

“WE ARE EVEN POORER, BUT THERE IS MORE WORK”
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF ECOTOURISM IN NICARAGUA

A Dissertation
by
CARTER ALLAN HUNT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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ABSTRACT

“We Are Even Poorer, But There Is More Work”

An Ethnographic Analysis of Ecotourism in Nicaragua. (August 2009)

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This research examines ecotourism outcomes in the context of large-scale tourism development in Nicaragua and focuses on Morgan’s Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. Since ecotourism involves the imposition of Western constructs of nature, biodiversity, communities and conservation, our attempts to evaluate or certify ecotourism are likewise derived from these constructs. Failing to recognize the context where ecotourism occurs may lead to evaluations that place excessive emphasis on poor performance while overlooking relative successes. Initial evaluations of this ecotourism project revealed deception, exploitation, and minimal dedication to ecotourism principles; however, continuing participant observation and ethnographic interviewing among employees and residents forced re-evaluation. In relation to unchecked tourism development in the region, and given the desperate Nicaraguan socio-economic reality for most rural residents, the project must be considered a moderate success.

This dissertation later invokes the dominant literature on local reactions to tourism development coming out of the field of tourism studies that uses stage-based

models to show that increasing experience with tourism leads to increasingly negative reactions to tourism. This is contrasted with ecotourism research that has shown how increasing participation in ecotourism leads to more favorable attitudes towards ecotourism projects. This dissertation examines these two seemingly disparate perspectives in the context of an ecotourism project. Three groups representing different levels of involvement with ecotourism are compared. The results support traditional tourism theory, suggesting fruitful opportunities for integration of research on conventional forms of tourism with research specific to ecotourism.

Finally, a political ecology approach is adopted to reveal mutually reinforcing cycles of capital accumulation and impoverishment leading to environmental degradation in the region resulting from tourism development in the region, as originally described in the influential book *Social Causes of Environmental Destruction in Latin America*. While that work focuses primarily on agricultural activities, here recent ethnographic research on ecotourism in southwestern Nicaragua is contextualized within rapid tourism development in the region and examined through a political ecological lens to reveal how tourism is responsible for the same destructive cycles revealed above. Despite achieving certain on-site success, even ecotourism contributes to, if not enables, larger processes of environmental exploitation in the Nicaraguan context.

For Eleanor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In nearly every region of the developing world, the persistence of poverty can be traced to an exhaustion of natural resources or to underdeveloped economies (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987). With population pressures increasing and consumption rates growing among the developed world, developing countries often cannot resist the temptation to exploit their non-renewable resources (Painter & Durham, 1995). Unfortunately such unsustainable practices offer only short-term economic gains. Nicaragua is one such country that continues to be very poor despite vast natural resource wealth. This makes it very vulnerable to resource exploitation. Despite its tumultuous political history, Nicaragua is stabilizing. The fourth consecutive post-revolutionary election in 2006 led to another peaceful transition of power in 2007. Mechanisms for effectively managing natural resources and promoting sustainable development are important for continuing this progress and ensuring a better future for Nicaragua. Research opportunities and needs in Nicaragua are evident even in popular press headlines that describe this country as the next ecotourism paradise as tourists move away from more Westernized and developed areas like Costa Rica, as Dicum (2006) notes in his NY Times article “The Rediscovery of Nicaragua.”

This dissertation follows the style of Annals of Tourism Research.

Tourism has long been recognized as a driver for economic development in developing countries (de Kadt, 1979; Hawkins & Maun, 2007), and is now considered the world's largest industry (WTO, 2007). As early as the late 1970's researchers also explored tourism's potential to contribute to biodiversity conservation (Budowski, 1976). However it was not until the World Commission on the Environment and Development published "Our Common Future," that sustainability entered the tourism lexicon (Brundtland, 1987). Discussions of sustainability in tourism require taking into consideration its economic, environmental, and socio-cultural components. One emerging niche in the tourism market that appears to embody all three of these aspects is ecotourism. To date research on ecotourism has been unable to achieve consensus as to how to even define ecotourism, let alone what constitutes success in this endeavor. Some have looked to it as a win-win situation for biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development (Boo, 1990; Lindberg, 1991; Ziffer, 1989), while others have concluded it is an unsustainable option (Cater, 1994), a new form of ecological imperialism (Hall, Cater, and Lowman, 1994), and an unattainable ideal ultimately responsible for more environmental damage than mass tourism (Wheeller, 1991). This research attempts to clarify the conditions that constitute success in ecotourism.

Literature Review

Since the 1987 meeting of the World Commission on the Environment and Development it has been recognized that the sustainability of "Our Common Future" requires a focus on not just economic growth but also on environmental impacts and

socio-cultural compatibility of different development strategies (Brundtland, 1987). It thus brought long overdue attention to global importance of biodiversity conservation. This importance was further elaborated at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit. This meeting of 172 governments, 108 heads of state, and 2,400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) yielded the Convention on Biological Diversity. The goal of this international treaty was to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

New approaches were therefore designed to address economic, social, and environmental sustainability by developing people-oriented conservation programs (McNeely, 1988). Efforts to increase local support for conservation strategies led to the creation of a diversity of people-oriented initiatives including integrated conservation and development projects (Brandon and Wells, 1992), community-based natural resource management (Mbaiwa, 2004), co-management (Chase et al, 2000), and community-managed or indigenous reserves (Zimmerman, Peres, Malcolm, and Turner, 2001; Schwartzman and Zimmerman, 2005). These programs all seek to increase development options of resource-dependent rural communities in order to decrease direct pressure on natural resources (Brechtin, et al, 2002).

As the world's second largest industry after oil (Weinburg, et al. 2002), tourism was in a particularly favorable position to contribute to sustainable development. Ensuring the sustainability of tourism requires examining its economic, environmental, and social elements. In an effort to promote sustainability in tourism, international

development agencies and large NGO's have endorsed the burgeoning niche form of tourism known as ecotourism as a win-win situation for economic development, biodiversity conservation, and improved well-being of local communities (Ziffer, 1989; Boo, 1990; Lindberg, et al., 1991). This support for ecotourism development continues to be as strong now as it was in the years following the publication of the "Our Common Future" as evident by calls at the 2003 World Parks Congress for increased measures to make ecotourism a more effective "vehicle" for conserving biodiversity and reducing poverty (IUCN, 2003). By providing an alternative income as well as an economic incentive to conserve the biodiversity on which it depends, and by offering social empowerment and inclusion in the decisions related to the management of resources, ecotourism can be an ideal tool for achieving the goals of community development and increased protection of biodiversity (Honey, 1999; Christ, et al, 2003).

Although the potential for tourism to contribute to conservation had been explored earlier, Ceballos-Lascurain is generally given credit with coining the term ecotourism in 1983 while working for PRONATURA in Mexico, describing it as:

"tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in those areas. Ecotourism implies a scientific, aesthetic, or philosophical approach, although the 'ecotourist' is not required to be a professional scientist, artist, or philosopher. The main point is that the person who practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences. This person will eventually acquire an awareness and knowledge of the natural environment, together with its cultural aspects, that will convert him into somebody involved in conservation issues" (Ceballos-Lascurain, in Ziffer, 1989: 5).

He later revises it as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996). While this definition was adopted by the International Conservation Union (IUCN), many other definitions have been proposed (see Diamantis, 1998; Sirakaya et al., 1999; or Fennell, 2001 for analyses of ecotourism definitions). Different levels of consideration (Hunt and Stronza, 2009), and the varied conditions in different regions, make a consensus definition difficult. Still, they generally include references to taking place in natural, relatively undisturbed areas, attempting to minimize the negative impacts on local communities and the natural environment, and contributing to the conservation of those areas (Higham & Lück, 2007).

The lofty objectives of ecotourism have proven difficult to implement and as a result ecotourism has received a fair share of criticism. Bookbinder and others (1998) found minimal contribution to household income from ecotourism to the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal despite a visitation rate exceeding 60,000 tourists. In Belize, Belsky (1999) found numerous contradictions implicit in community-based ecotourism, including unsustainable harvest of raw materials for tourism-related handicraft manufacture, un-equitable distribution of ecotourism benefits leading to reinforcement of community rivalries, and tourists’ purposeful avoidance of the realities of Third World poverty, inequality, racism, and resource exploitation. Hughes (2001) found

ecotourism development undermines local subsistence agricultural practices in Zimbabwe by removing access to land. In Guatemala, Langholz (1999) found households involved in ecotourism now have the economic means to afford shotguns for hunting, and to replace machetes with chainsaws, making their resource destruction and land conversion more efficient. Stronza (2007) later demonstrated this relationship empirically in Peru, where new household income contributed to increased means of production. Stem and others (2003) determined that employment in ecotourism is simply not sufficient for influencing pro-conservation perspectives in Costa Rica. In some cases researchers have even suggested that the returns on biodiversity conservation have not justified the investment made in ecotourism development and that direct payments for conservation are more effective (Ferraro, 2001; Kiss, 2004). West & Carrier (2004) suggest that ecotourism is a neoliberal mechanism that subordinates environmental conservation and respect for local communities to concern for attracting tourists. These findings reinforce the notion that economic impacts are necessary but not sufficient for ecotourism success.

Under other circumstances ecotourism has proven effective for empowering local communities to support biodiversity conservation (Honey, 1999; Schevyns, 1999; Stonich, 1998; Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Stronza and Pegas 2008). Even critiques of ecotourism, such as those of Bookbinder et al (1998) and Belsky (1999), uphold the importance of participation by demonstrating how the *lack* of participation in decision-making contributes to ecotourism failures. While the definition of conservation would spark a debate no less intense than that related to the meaning of ecotourism, in much of

the social science research related to ecotourism, the development of a “conservation ethic” among communities typically serves as a proxy (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). Wunder notes that as biodiversity became an income generating asset in the Cuyabeno Lake area in Ecuador, natural resource management took on a “self-imposed rationality” leading to conservation outcomes such as enforced restrictions on over-hunting (2000). Alexander (1999) found that favorable attitudes toward an ecotourism project in Belize depended on the extent of local participation and fair employment allocation within the community. This finding confirmed a previous Belizean case study which made the conclusion that local support for conservation depends on the level of involvement in decision-making (Lindberg, et al., 1996). Support for conservation was also enhanced by the sharing of ecotourism-related revenues in Uganda (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001). Stronza (2007; 2008) and Stronza and Gordillo’s (2008) work in Peru has made major contributions to this body of research by highlighting the importance of conservation ethics and local participation, preferably in management and/or ownership, to the success of ecotourism projects.

Loon & Polakow (2001) studied ecotourism in South Africa and found that revenue sharing, and in particular joint ventures, to be most effective for both biodiversity conservation and *strengthening community institutions*, a conclusion again confirmed by Stronza (2007) in southeastern Peru (2007) and Stronza and Pegas (2008) in Brazil. Institutions are sets of formal and informal rules and norms that shape interactions of humans with nature (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Strong institutions enhance sustainability by guiding the collective action of communities (Ostrom, 1990),

therefore decreasing the likelihood of the commons tragedy (Harding, 1968). By operating on the interest of the group rather than the individual, institutions depend on relations of trust, reciprocity, common rules, norms and sanctions, and connectedness, collectively referred to as social capital (Putnam, 1995). High social capital reduces the “costs” of collective action, and when present these relations are related to positive environmental outcomes (Petty & Ward, 2001) and other biodiversity dividends such as in agriculture, nearby nature, and protected areas (Petty & Smith, 2004). Jones demonstrated that high levels of social capital were instrumental to ecotourism success, yet also challenged the ability of ecotourism to maintain it over time (2005). While strong institutions and high social capital both contribute to ecotourism success, the extent to which ecotourism strengthens local institutions or enhances social capital remains to be determined.

Despite the discrepancies in definition and practice, there continues to be a firm consensus that ecotourism offers “a promising route for generating benefits for those living close to tropical biodiversity without undermining its existence” (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). If ecotourism is to realize its potential as a strategy for connecting conservation and development, the factors determining where, when, how, and why ecotourism is successful must be clarified. While economic viability has been demonstrated to be of primary importance (Weinburg et al., 2002), the principles of sustainability dictate that economic viability is not sufficient for sustaining a successful ecotourism operation. Benefits of conservation must be felt in the community (Gordillo, Hunt, & Stronza, 2008). Where employment and income opportunities from ecotourism

are lacking projects will be unsuccessful (Bookbinder et al 1998). Exclusion from participation in ownership and management also contributes to ecotourism failure (Stem et al. 2003) while inclusion in ownership and management increases the likelihood of success (Stronza and Pegas, 2008; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008).

Research Objectives

This research is an ethnographic analysis of an ecotourism project operating on the southwestern Pacific Coast of Nicaragua and aims to clarify the conditions under which ecotourism is successful. Of particular interest are the social and cultural influences on perception of, and attitudes toward, ecotourism. Three particular variables were originally of interest: level of participation in ownership and management of ecotourism; conservation ethics and institutions; and economic changes associated with ecotourism. Relationships between these three variables were examined within the research site in Nicaragua. These initial objectives can be summarized as follows:

Objective #1: Evaluate social and cultural processes of community participation in ecotourism.

Objective #2: Identify economic changes associated with ecotourism.

Objective #3: Assess conservation ethics and institutions.

Objective #4: Find linkages between conservation ethics and institutions in each site with a) participation in ecotourism, and b) economic changes from ecotourism.

These objectives explore the mechanisms linking ecotourism with conservation, starting with the creation of economic incentives from employment and income. According to scholarship on market-based conservation, economic incentives may or may not lead to a conservation ethic (Langholz, 1999; Wunder, 2000). Therefore, a second mechanism linking ecotourism with conservation - the creation of economic incentives *and* social capital – is examined. Case study literature in ecotourism suggests that when local communities engage in ecotourism as owners and managers, their social capital increases (Stronza, 2007; Stronza and Pegas, 2008; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). With this increased social capital, local institutions for conservation may be strengthened. This research thus examines the extent to which economic benefits combine with participation in ecotourism lead to a conservation ethic that is sustained by strong institutions.

Methodology

Study Site

This research will take place in southwestern Nicaragua. More specifically, the ecotourism project of interest, Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge, is located just outside the town of San Juan del Sur, about two hours from the capital Managua, and only 1 ½ hours from the Costa Rican border by automobile. This lodge is part of an 800 hectare private nature reserve and 1,000 hectare tree farming and reforestation program. Native charismatic wildlife include howler monkeys, sloths, sea turtles, and a plethora of tropical bird species. A sugar mill, organic shrimp farm, dairy farm, butterfly farm and

certified wood program all operate on the premises. Along with wildlife viewing hikes in the nature reserve's dry tropical forest, Morgan's Rock offers estuarine kayaking, a traditional fishing experience, visits to a sugar mill complete with rum tasting, horseback riding, therapeutic massage, and yoga classes at sunrise and sunset. The lodge is a 40 minute drive to the popular seaside town of San Juan del Sur.

Research Design and Data Collection

This research is ethnographic and involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The data collection methods I utilized included free lists, pile sorts, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation of tourism-related activities, operations in the area of San Juan del Sur and Morgan's Rock. I gathered field notes over 5 months of research in this region of Nicaragua. I performed free-listing exercises with conservationists and project staff in the style of the Threat Reduction Assessment (Salafsky and Margoluis, 1999) to identify the primary threats to conservation in the region and determine the conservation outcomes of the project. "Although the Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA) approach has the theoretical disadvantages of being a proxy measurement of biodiversity and is subject to bias, it has the theoretical advantages of being sensitive to changes over short time periods and throughout a project site, and of allowing comparison among projects in different settings. Furthermore, it is practical and cost-effective because it is based on data collected through simple techniques, it is directly related to project interventions, it is readily interpretable by project staff, and it can be done in retrospect" (1999: 830). It has been

successfully utilized to evaluate conservation project outcomes in Peru (1999) and Africa (Bleher & Bergsdorf, 2006; Muguisha & Jacobson, 2004). Here the process I used to identify the three primary biodiversity targets most in need of conservation involved the first three steps of the seven-step TRA approach: 1) Define the project area spatially and temporally; 2) Develop a list of all direct threats to the biodiversity at the project site present at the start date, and define what completely (100%) meeting this threat will entail; and 3) Rank each threat based on the three criteria of area, intensity, and urgency. The three primary conservation targets identified in the Threat Reduction Assessment were incorporated into the interview guide.

Data were also gathered with a 1-2 hour semi-structured interview. Elements of the interview instrument correspond to the specific variables of interest in this study including household composition, income and expenses; participation in and perception of tourism; conservation and resource management institutions; collective action; control and involvement in decision making; and perceived quality of life. The indicators used to represent each variable are listed below (see Appendix for full questionnaire):

1. Household Composition

- Sex, age, education, children, age of children of the participant, and number of people in their household.

2. Income and Expenses

- Data will be gathered on new income and employment gained for individuals and households, as well as estimates of community-wide economic benefits.

In addition to calculating absolute values of income, relative contribution of ecotourism will be determined by calculating percentages of total household income earned from ecotourism, and the number of employment positions filled relative to the number of individuals available to work.

3. Participation in and Perception of Ecotourism

- Questions will probe how and why individuals and communities became initially involved in ecotourism, how they describe the various steps, achievements, and challenges in the process, who they identify as allies and partners, and how the process coincided with other events in the community. Participation will be assessed by determining the share of time spent working in tourism, frequency and types of encounters with tourists, amount of time invested in management of the project, and responses to a series of self-ranking scales.

4. Conservation and Resource Management Institutions

- With respect to each of the three primary conservation targets identified in the Threat Reduction Assessment, participants will be asked what they think, feel, and say about resource use and conservation. Institutions specific to these resources, if any, will be described, including any sanctions for violating these institutions, any changes in these rules over time, and the management of resource conflicts. Perceptions of the scarcity of the resource will also be assessed.

5. Collective Action

- This variable relates to social capital and will examine relations of trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and cohesion in the community, and how these relations have changed over time, particularly in relation to ecotourism and conservation.

6. Control and Involvement in Decision Making

- This variable is measured by indicators of empowerment, including the ability to contribute to decisions that affect the community or to make a direct positive impact on the community.

7. Perceived Quality of Life

- Perceived quality of life is measured by asking participants how they define a good life, and if they feel as though they have a good life.

Data Analysis

The Threat Reduction Assessment data will be analyzed in the manner suggested by Salafsky & Margoluis (1999). This process consists of the remaining four steps: 4) The total number of threats will be summed, and this number will be assigned to the highest ranking threat according to each criteria. The three scores for each threat will then be added together; 5) Determine the degree to which each threat has been met (based on 100% defined in step 2; 6) Calculate a raw score for each threat (ranking x percentage of threat met); and 7) Calculate the final threat reduction index score (sum

raw scores/sum total rankings. This serves as the measure of success of the project with respect to direct biodiversity conservation.

In order to address the first research objective, I planned to gather ethnographic data from semi-structured interviews and participant observation, code this data, and then use grounded theory to build understanding of community participation in ecotourism. Accomplishing the second objective (*identify economic changes associated with ecotourism*) was to involve analyzing the interview data related to household income and the percentage derived from tourism. For the third objective (*assess conservation ethics and institutions*) I intended to conduct an analysis of the coded data related to resource management institutions specific to the conservation targets identified in the Threat Reduction Assessment, as well as more general institutions for collective action and the degree of social capital in the community.

Timeline

The field work required to collect the data for this study was undertaken between January and June 2008. The process generally followed a three phase approach. The initial phase was oriented toward familiarization with the region and with Morgan's Rock, its surroundings, the area it affects. During this phase the Threat Reduction Assessment was conducted to establish the conservation targets for the region. I was also able to gather valuable data during meetings with two former employees of Morgan's Rock. It was during this phase that the extent of tourism development occurring in the region was fully revealed. I visited many of the prominent tourism

developments around San Juan del Sur and held informal discussion with their developers as well as with resident tourists. Lastly, I established contact with the on-site staff at Morgan's Rock and preliminary visits were arranged.

During the second month of the research I relocated to the property of Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. This allowed unprecedented access to the facilities and those working for the project and the integrated tree plantation (hereafter referred as the plantation, *finca*, or Hacienda). Along with the rich participant observation data this opportunity revealed, this phase culminated with the gathering of semi-structured interview data from 20 ecolodge employees and 20 plantation workers. Scheduling interviews, and in some cases rescheduling them, in and around work schedules was time consuming. After a brief visit to Costa Rica to meet with consultants involved in the initial development of Morgan's Rock, and to visit the ecolodge serving as its inspiration, I returned to San Juan del Sur for the third and final phase of the research. This final period was dedicated to acquiring 20 additional interviews from those rural households living closest in proximity to Morgan's Rock. This was at times a harrowing process as the area of Morgan's Rock is specifically identified on the U.S. State Department Consular Information Sheet as an area in which to "exercise particular caution." During this time I attempted to obtain any remaining data, fill in the gaps in the evolving narratives, and explore to the extent possible variables or linkages of interest revealed during the ethnographic research process through additional site visits and informal discussions.

Significance of the Research

Ecotourism has been hailed as a potential win-win situation for socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation. To date much of ecotourism research, including that which supports it (Archabald & Naughton Treves, 2001; Wunder, 2000; Lindberg, et al., 1996) and that which criticizes it (Bookbinder, et al., 1996; Ferraro, 2001; Kiss, 2004), has focused on economic factors. While economic viability is of utmost importance, it is the socio-cultural and environmental sustainability that distinguishes ecotourism from other forms of tourism. Without them, ecotourism is little different than mass tourism (Wight, 1993; Wheeler, 1991). Understanding of the conditions leading to success in these areas will be expanded with this research. This is particularly significant because tourism is now the world's largest industry (WTO, 2007), its growth rate in developing countries is double that of developed nations (Roe et al., 2004), and calls continue to further its development (IUCN, 2003).

Conservation ethics and strengthened resource management institutions are desired socio-cultural outcomes of ecotourism which directly contribute to biodiversity conservation. Participation in management and ownership of ecotourism projects has been shown to contribute to these two outcomes (Stronza 2007, Stronza and Gordillo 2008, Stronza and Pegas 2008). By examining the nature of participation in ecotourism, and other conditions that foster the development of these two outcomes in the Nicaraguan context, this project contributes to the field of ecotourism research.

Field Realities and Evolution of the Research

This research originally proposed to ethnographically examine Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge in order to identify success factors for the project that go beyond economic factors alone. Of particular interest were the social and cultural processes of community participation in ecotourism and three associated variables: level of participation in ownership and management of ecotourism; conservation ethics and institutions; and economic changes associated with ecotourism. As is common in ethnographic research, conditions in the field and themes that emerge during the fieldwork influenced the direction of the research. This section describes some of the factors affecting the evolution of this research.

First, it quickly became evident that Morgan's Rock is not a community-based project. Although it is located in close proximity to one of Nicaragua's primary tourism destinations, the area directly surrounding the project is very rural and sparsely populated. No form of organized community, political entities, institutional bodies are served by this project. As will be described, even the employees are largely imported from other regions of the country. It essentially exists as an enclave with the exception of a few token community outreach activities. Thus in the absence of readily identifiable community or any efforts to promote involvement of local residents, this research ultimately is not able to address the objectives related to community resource management institutions as well as originally intended.

Despite this setback, permission was granted from the Morgan's Rock administrator to relocate onto the premises of Morgan's Rock. I was thus given

remarkable access to the project and its staff. I lived in employee quarters and participated in all aspects of daily life, eating rice and beans daily for nearly all meals, assisting employees with English classes, playing baseball in the spare time and cards in the evening, performing my share of maintenance chores, and conversing at length about the project, tourism, natural resources, and Nicaraguan realities with all 45 members of the hotel staff and the majority of the 85 member hacienda staff. This integration allowed for a high level of rapport to develop with the hotel employees, fostering an intimate knowledge of the tourism and the tree plantation operations, their histories, and their integration with other enterprises.

After an initial one-month period, the arrangement was extended for a second month. Coming to understand the distinct experiences of the hotel staff vs. the plantation staff, and with the continued intention of interviewing local neighboring residents, the opportunity presented itself to evaluate the perceptions and attitudes of the three groups of Nicaraguans most affected by this ecotourism project – ecolodge staff directly employed in ecotourism, plantation staff working on the same premises and with indirect connections to the hotel, and finally the neighboring residents living directly adjacent to the property, incidentally none of whom currently are employed at Morgan's Rock. Along with this unexpected opportunity to participate so intimately in the daily lives of the employees at Morgan's Rock over a two-month period, plus five months of living and working at another ecotourism operation in the central highlands of Nicaragua in 2005, provided valuable insight into Nicaraguan socio-economic realities, the issues of concern to local residents, and how ecotourism relates to those concerns.

Format of the Dissertation

I now briefly summarize the chapters that follow. I have written the next three chapters with an eye toward submission to peer-reviewed journal in each of the three primary subject areas that this research and my academic preparation relate to: anthropology, tourism, and development studies. Thus the following chapter is an anthropological approach to analyzing Morgan's Rock that focuses on the project as a whole as the unit of analysis. I utilize the voices of the hotel employees, plantation staff, neighboring residents in order to reveal both positive and negative outcomes of the project. First, these local perspectives are used to address the projects adherence to absolute standards of ecotourism derived from scholarly writings and certification programs. This assessment suggests the project is an utter failure and perhaps worse, a fraud. I then reframe the evaluation of the project within the harsh socio-economic realities of Nicaragua. Within this context, the local voices reveal many relative merits of this ecotourism project. The chapter closes with a discussion of how these perspectives can be rectified within the scholarly writing on ecotourism.

The next chapter then compares two highly related, but contrasting theoretical perspectives on local resident reactions to different forms of tourism. The first perspective comes from the field of tourism studies. This line of research suggests local attitudes towards conventional tourism worsen as experience with it increases. A second perspective comes from emerging research on participation focusing specifically on ecotourism. This line of research comes not just from the field of tourism research but largely from other social science disciplines. The findings here suggest that increased

involvement and participation improves attitudes towards, and also positively affects other desirable outcomes of, ecotourism. In this case, the differences between the voiced attitudes and perceptions of the three primary groups examined in this research - hotel employees, tree plantation employees, and neighboring residents – are compared and contrasted. Findings are then related to both sets of scholarly writing introduced earlier in the chapter.

The fourth chapter takes a step back in order to situate Morgan's Rock in the context of the rapid tourism development taking place up and down the coast in the vicinity of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. The fact that locals make little meaningful distinctions between ecotourism and the rest of the tourism, viewing it primarily as a single entity, forced consideration of the larger context of tourism where Morgan's Rock occurs. Despite economic gains and employment opportunities for some, aggregate secondary data is combined with ethnographically-gathered information to reveal that the manner in which tourism is currently developing in this region of Nicaragua is leading to a self-reinforcing cycle of accumulation of capital among foreign investors and local elites. This in turn displaces the poor and relegates them to a second self-reinforcing cycle of impoverishment, and eventually creates a feedback loop with the first cycle. Even if ideally managed in such a context, ecotourism appears to do more to contribute to these cycles than it does to reverse them. I discuss these conclusions, as well as those from previous chapters, in the fifth and final chapter.

CHAPTER II
RELATIVE SUCCESS AMIDST ABSOLUTE FAILURE?
CRITIQUING THE CRITIQUE OF ECOTOURISM IN NICARAGUA

Introduction

The notion of ecotourism is still quite a new one. The coining of the term itself is typically attributed to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) just a little over twenty years ago. While the idea of using tourism to support environmental conservation was not new (Budowski 1976), the coining of the term coincided with the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development's report *Our Common Future* (WECD 1987). By drawing attention to environmental and social issues lacking in the economic development initiatives of the previous decades, the report single-handedly ushered in the era of sustainable development. The perceived capacity of ecotourism to simultaneously serve as biodiversity conservation and economic development tool led to an explosion of ecotourism growth in the years following that publication. As the primary vehicle for the implementation of sustainability in tourism, this trajectory of ecotourism growth has paralleled that of the sustainability paradigm in general, and is now the fastest growing sector (Weinburg, Bellows, and Eckster 2002) in tourism, the world's largest industry (WTO 2007).

The body of research on ecotourism has grown along a similar trajectory. The explosion of interest in the last two decades is dramatic, going from virtually non-existent 30 years ago to a research topic of enormous attention. Social Science Citation

Index searches for ecotourism in each of the previous three decades (1979-1988; 1989-1998; 1999-2008) reveal 1, 188, and 519 studies produced in these respective time periods. The 2003 World Parks Congress endorsement of ecotourism, as well as the United Nations declaration of 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, highlights this prominence. While some have argued that these are indications that it has come of age as a field of inquiry (Weaver and Lawton, 2007), ecotourism research continues to experience many growing pains. Competing and conflicting schools of thought remain among scholars (Higham, 2007), while on-the-ground examination of operations suggests a widening gap between the principled, scholarly idealizations of how ecotourism should be and the pragmatics of how ideas relating to ecotourism are actually implemented in particular geo-socio-political circumstances (Medina, 2005). Indeed in their review of biodiversity conservation mechanisms that also address poverty, Agrawal and Redford (2006) agree that much of the problem with research on ecotourism is that it tends to focus on programs themselves rather than on the context in which they take place.

As a result of this rapid growth in both demand and supply, much of the industry is vulnerable to developing “ecotourism lite”, or a green-washing of existing operations as operators scramble for a piece of the action (Honey, 1999). While this is universally recognized as a major problem undermining credibility of the ecotourism sector (Weaver and Lawton, 2007), relatively little research has focused on the phenomenon. Far more attention has focused a proposed solution for ensuring that ecotourism continues to adhere to the principles of sustainability - the development of accredited standards and

certifying bodies for legitimizing ecotourism operations (Font and Harris 2004; Font, Sanabria, and Skinner 2003; Honey 2002; 2008). Yet accreditation schemes are likely to involve the imposition of Western constructs of nature, conservation, community, development, and success or failure (West and Carrier 2004; Cater 2006; Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt, 2008), favor economic considerations over environmental ones (Sasidharan, Sirakaya, and Kerstetter, 2002), and exclude small and medium enterprises, thereby exacerbating existing global inequalities (Medina, 2005). Accreditation is designed to promote compliance-oriented behavior, yet often projects put token measures in place in order to satisfy the certification criteria and green-wash their image (Mowforth and Munt, 2008). When ecotourism managers follow a check-list in order to satisfy external certification criteria, their project is not as likely to be as effective for biodiversity conservation or community development as more ambitious and creative achievements derived from the social, cultural, political, and environmental contexts specific to where an ecotourism project occurs.

The development of certification standards is also hindered by a continual struggle to reach a consensus on a standard definition of ecotourism (Diamantis, 1999; Sirakaya, Sasidharan, & Sönmez, 1999; Fennell, 2001; Björk, 2007). Indeed meanings of participation, community, and benefits can vary significantly depending on who is asked (Medina, 2005) and the level at which it is analyzed or discussed (Hunt & Stronza, 2009). As a result, accreditation standards, or any other criteria for evaluation that are derived from academic, Western-oriented meanings of ecotourism, nature, conservation, poverty, and so on, will very likely yield results that vary from other analyses in which

these meanings and the criteria for success or failure are derived from the specific context in where they take place (Stronza and Gordillo 2008). While Crick (1989) called for the inclusion of more local voices in evaluations of tourism, this paucity of attention to external environments (Weaver and Lawton, 2007) and indigenous perspectives (Zeppel, 2007) has only recently been recognized in scholarly writing on ecotourism. As Stronza and Gordillo (2008:463) point out, “just as ecotourism can be more effective when locals participate actively, so too can our evaluations of how and why ecotourism either fails or succeeds for local communities become more meaningful when we engage local residents as evaluators.” If ecotourism is most effective when developed with local conditions in mind, then so shouldn’t the criteria used to evaluate or certify ecotourism projects also be developed with the specific local conditions in mind?

This paper attempts to address the widening gaps between scholarly approaches to conceptualizing and evaluating ecotourism and ways in which the opportunities represented by ecotourism are perceived and assessed by employees and neighbors of an ecotourism project located along the Pacific Coast of southwestern Nicaragua. This addresses the incongruence between theory and practice identified by Ross and Wall (1999). While scholars simultaneously influence and are influenced by the idealized images espoused by tourists, popular tourism media, and the tourism industry, local residents in rural, developing countries are unlikely to have such exposure, and as a result, no basis on which to distinguish ecotourism from other forms of tourism, or to develop the lofty expectations of ecotourism common among its proponents. How and why perceptions and attitudes towards ecotourism vary is not easy to understand in such

contexts, and as this paper reveals, ethnographic research can be a valuable tool for any attempt to do so.

The first part of the paper presents a description of a specific ecotourism destination in Nicaragua, the methodology I used to study it, and my initial evaluation of its adherence to the academically-derived ecotourism principles which often serve as the basis for certification schemes. As I will show, this resulted in a rather bleak portrait of the ecotourism project with respect to these “absolute” criteria. Yet the ethnographic research also reveals many positive outcomes of this project. In order to most effectively describe these outcomes, I shift gears to a discussion of the harsh socio-economic context in Nicaragua, and a brief background on recent tourism growth in this country with emphasis on the study region. This is akin to what Carrier and MacLeod (2005) refer to as “bursting the bubble.” My initial evaluations, made from an academically informed perspective, are then re-considered in light of this contextualization and qualitative information revealed during the research process. This results in very different conclusions about the performance of the project and reveals several “relative” merits. I close the paper with a discussion of the theoretical implications of these “absolute” and “relative” approaches within ecotourism research to date and suggest a few opportunities for future research.

Introducing Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge

My research focuses primarily on the project Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. Modeled after the highly acclaimed Lapa Ríos eco-lodge located on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, Morgan's Rock claims to be "a project of nature conservation, community development and reforestation offering Agro- and Ecotourism at its best" (www.morgansrock.com). It has received much praise in popular media outlets including the New York Times, Condé Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, American Way, The Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, CNN, and also recently served as a shoot location for the 2007 Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition. The popular media and the touring public's acceptance of Morgan's Rock as embodying ecotourism, the information provided on the project website, and their association with Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, a reputable Costa Rican management firm dedicated to the implementation of sustainability in tourism, served as the basis for my selection of this project as the focus of the present research.

Morgan's Rock is located 40 km from San Juan del Sur, and within a two hour automobile ride of both Managua and the Costa Rican border (Figures 1-5). The property is part of an 800 hectare private nature reserve and 1,000 hectare tree farming and reforestation program initiated by the wealthy French Ponçon family and their partner incorporated into *AgroForestal S.A.* Arriving in the late 1970s as an oil prospector, Clemente Ponçon and his family have grown into one of the wealthiest in Nicaragua and own some of the



Figure 1. Nicaragua and North America



Figure 2. Nicaragua and Central America

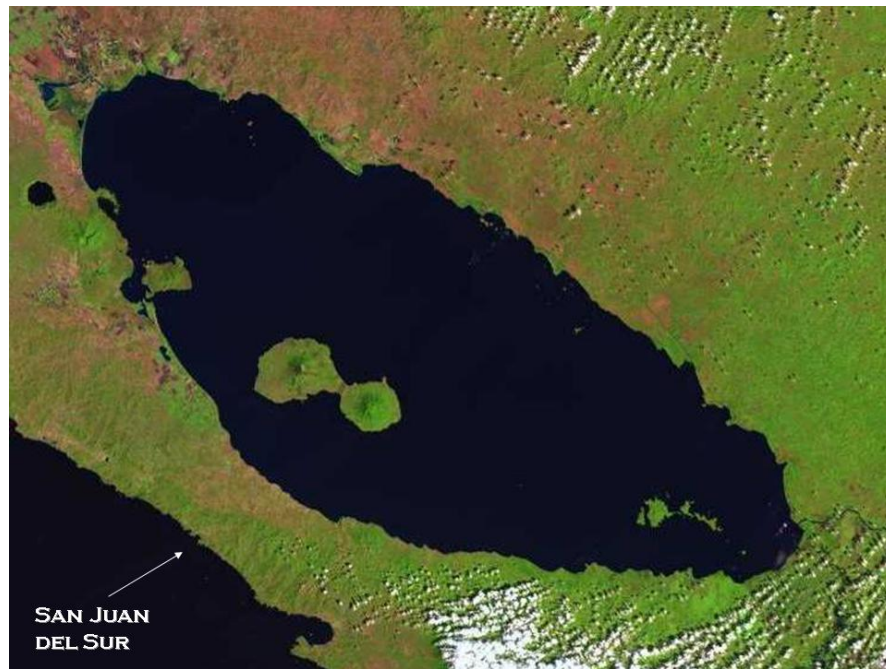


Figure 3. Southwestern Nicaragua

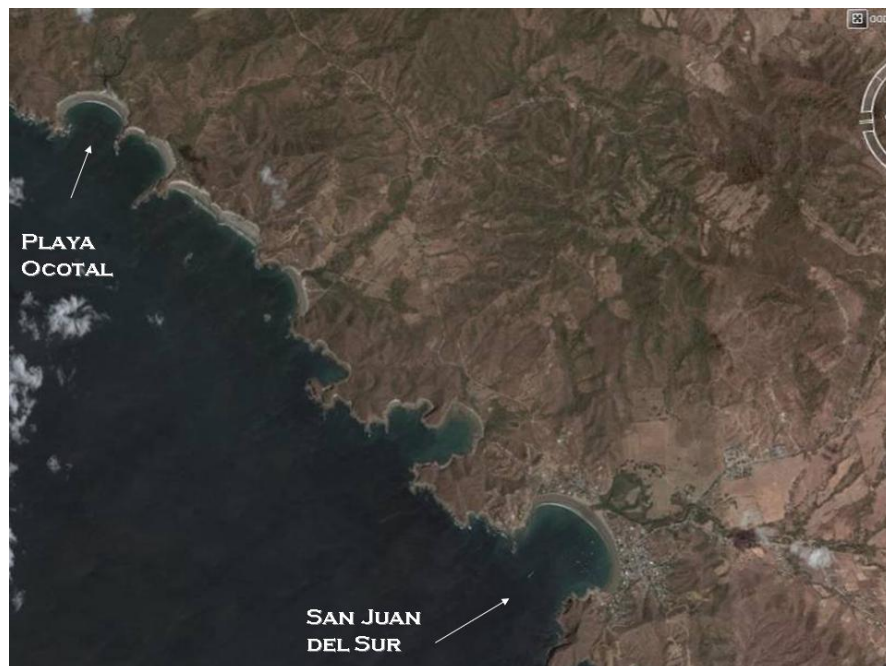


Figure 4. San Juan del Sur Coastline



Figure 5. Morgan's Rock Beachfront

country's largest coffee plantations in the central highlands. The family is also involved in lumber concessions along the Atlantic Coast, furniture fabrication, agriculture, and additional vacation home and resort development near Morgan's Rock.

The property where Morgan's Rock is located was formerly a cooperative of peasant farmers that acquired the land through socialist agrarian reforms of the 1980s. It is rumored to have belonged to the Somoza family prior to the 1979 revolution, and later to a Sandanista officer. The Ponçon family purchased the property piecemeal from local residents in the early 1990s, most of whom were short-lived benefactors of the Sandinista agrarian reforms of the 1980s. Many neighboring residents claim to have been intimidated into selling by the imposing presence of the large Frenchman and his daunting entourage of wealthy Managuan lawyers. The family that once possessed the

largest tract, once named *La Esperanza*, even claims that their payment was given to someone other than the owner and that they have yet to see the money.

The first several years were dedicated to establishing the tree farm and the planting of precious tropical wood. These activities employed many of the surrounding residents. Later, the Ponçon family was inspired by the conservation and sustainable development philosophies of the Lapa Ríos eco-lodge. Lapa Ríos is a privately owned ecotourism project located on the Osa Peninsula of southwestern Costa Rica originally constructed by Americans Karen and John Lewis (Lapa Ríos, 2009). It is currently managed by Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality (Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, 2009), a specialty management firm that operates hotels according to the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program in Costa Rica (CST, 2003). Lapa Ríos currently holds a five green leaf certification, the highest offered by the program. It has won prominent awards from Condé Nast, National Geographic Adventure Magazine, Andrew Harper, Forbes Travelers, Rainforest Alliance, and the U.S. Department of State.

The Ponçon family endeavored to replicate such an ecotourism project in Nicaragua. This led to the construction and opening of Morgan's Rock in 2004. Initially, the family followed in the footsteps of Lapa Ríos by employing Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality. They contracted Cayuga to conduct the initial feasibility studies, to share in lodge design and layout, perform start-up training including training visits to Lapa Ríos, and install Morgan Rock's first administrator, a German national. Later in 2005 the Ponçon family continued on their own without Cayuga and installed a

young Nicaraguan woman from León with post-graduate training in Spain as administrator.

The facilities at Morgan's Rock consist of 15 luxury cabins that sit on forested bluffs overlooking a secluded white sand beach and incorporate the distinctive architecture of AgroForestal associate Matthew Faulkner. Faulkner is responsible for the design of the furniture from *Simplemente Madera*, the nearby *Balcones de Majagual* vacation homes and the *Pitaya Vaya* resort currently under construction at a neighboring beach. The spacious open-air lobby, poolside dining area, and guest cabins are all framed in volcanic rock and adorned with furniture and accessories from *Simplemente Madera*. Each guest cabin is situated to maximize the spectacular view of the privatized horseshoe bay previously known by locals as Ocotal Beach. Additional buildings include a massage bungalow, beachside yoga platform, and shore-side thatched roof huts complete with hammocks and lounge chairs. The facilities at Morgan's Rock serve as a veritable showroom for products of the Ponçon family and their AgroForestales business partners, where the exotic wood and building materials from the adjoining tree farm, the furniture and furnishing from *Simplemente Madera*, and coffee from the family farms, and the architecture available in the *Balcones de Majagual* vacation homes are all on exhibit. Ironically, much of the wood used to construct these facilities was brought in from the Autonomous Atlantic regions of Nicaragua where the family has timber concessions, including the authority to recover wood downed by hurricanes and to purchase seized wood in government auctions. Morgan's Rock can therefore meet a

demand for this exotic wood, which is even greater than the capacity of production on-site at the Hacienda.

With respect to native charismatic wildlife, Morgan's Rock features black-mantled howler monkeys, two-toed sloth, green iguanas and black ctenosaurs, occasional nesting sea turtles, and a plethora of tropical bird species. A sugar and rum mill, organic shrimp farm, dairy farm, butterfly farm and certified wood program are all described in the promotional materials. Along with wildlife viewing hikes in the nature reserve's dry tropical forest, Morgan's Rock offers estuary kayaking, a traditional artisan fishing experience, a rum tasting at the sugar mill, horseback riding, mountain biking, therapeutic massage, yoga classes at sunrise and sunset, and excursions to other nearby sites of interest.

Study Methods

This paper is based on an ethnographic analysis of Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge, located along the southwestern coast of Nicaragua. I carried out fieldwork between January and June of 2008 in the municipal region of San Juan del Sur, located in the Department of Rivas along the southwestern coast of Nicaragua. In addition to participant observation, I gathered data through semi-structured interviews, countless informal discussions, and several site visits to additional tourism projects in the San Juan del Sur area. I gathered additional secondary data on tourism, socio-economics, and demographics throughout the research process from the national offices of tourism, census, the World Bank, previous research and a variety of other sources.

While the fieldwork was brief by most ethnographic standards, the quality of the data was enhanced by two factors. First, the research process was greatly facilitated by my previous work experience in Nicaragua with a ecotourism project and organic coffee farm, *Finca Esperanza Verde*, in the remote highlands of Matagalpa from December 2004 and May 2005. In addition to daily interactions with rural poor, during that time I was also given the opportunity to attend several meetings of the National Institute of Tourism (INTUR) as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources (MARENA). This provided me an important background on the socio-economic conditions, the history and culture, and nature and direction of tourism development in Nicaragua.

Second, I secured permission from the “ecolodge” at Morgan’s Rock live on-site in the employee dormitories for a period of two months. The lodge administrator granted this access to the lodge in exchange for assistance with English instruction for members of the reception and restaurant staff. This allowed me intimate 24-hour a day access to all hotel staff members and their daily activities, and also regular interaction with members of the tree plantation staff. During that period I observed work activities in the areas of reception, guiding, restaurant wait/bar/kitchen, gardeners, maintenance, cleaning, security, and drivers. I also participated in many of the tourist activities including dry tropical forest and riverbed walks, artisanal fishing, estuary kayaking, night walks, and excursions to Volcano Mombacho and the Isletas of Granada. Yet most valuable to the research was the opportunity I had to participate fully in all aspects of employee life: lodging in an isolated group of six employee cabins, taking of meals in the separate employee kitchen, eating rice and beans for every one of those meals, inter-

property baseball games between hotel and plantation staff on rocky ground with homemade bats, profanity and smoke-filled nightly card games, and occasional trips off-property for dinner and dancing to celebrate staff birthdays.

As a result of the 24/7 involvement, I was able develop a high level of rapport that contributed to internal validity of the conclusions presented later. In addition, the isolated and communal nature of the living conditions meant that few voiced opinions, whether intended for my ears or not, escaped my notice. This time also greatly increased my grasp of local colloquialisms and of the relatively rare Spanish verb tense spoken only in a few select regions of Latin America (*vos*, a familiar second person singular verb form), which is the most common spoken form in Nicaragua. When the research process later took me into the households of rural neighboring residents of Morgan's Rock, my ear was already highly tuned to the rhythm and slang of the local dialect.

Along with rich participant observation data, early on in the research process I conducted three interviews with local conservationists, and another three with the hacienda administrator and two ecotourism guides, in order to gather consensus on the primary threats to conservation in the region. This information was used to adapt a pre-formulated interview guide for local Nicaraguan conditions (see Appendix for complete questionnaire). This guide was later utilized to guide 60 semi-structured interviews. I conducted the first twenty of these semi-structured interviews with the individuals indirectly employed in ecotourism via their work on the Morgan's Rock premises at an integrated farm and tree plantation (this is formally La Hacienda though it is more commonly referred to on-site as *La Finca*). Later, I carried out another 20 interviews

with living companions, those individuals directly employed at Morgan's Rock Eco-lodge (referred to on-site as *El Hotel*). In addition to these twenty interviews, I also gathered information on age, regional department of origin, marital status, number of children, and former employment from the full hotel 45-person staff. During later months, I gathered the final 20 semi-structured interviews from the rural households residing directly adjacent to Morgan's Rock along the single dirt road leading to, and beyond, the property. As the opportunities presented themselves, I also had lengthy, informal interviews with two former employees, the son of the owning family who considered the brainchild of the project, a tourism consultant from Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality involved with the initial development and management of Morgan's Rock, ex-patriot home owners at Balcones de Majagual, employees of the realty office which handles the Balcones properties, former owners of the agricultural cooperative where Morgan's Rock is currently located, and numerous other tourists and foreign developers in San Juan del Sur.

Description of the Interviewees

Table 1 shows descriptive information about the 60 individuals with whom I conducted the semi-structured individuals. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 63, and averaged around 37 years old. Eighteen were women and forty-two were men, and they averaged just over 6 years of formal education. The number of children ranged from 0 to 17, with three being average. Household size was typically around 6 individuals, with areas under cultivation of 3.5 manzanas, or around 3 hectares.

Reported monthly expenses averages C\$2218.47, approximately U\$117/month, with food being responsible for 63% of these expenses. Out of the 60 interviewees, 13 hailed from San Juan del Sur, another 23 from other areas within the Department of Rivas, though 24 were from other departments altogether.

Table 1. Respondents' Descriptive Information

	Overall	Finca Employees	Hotel Employees	Neighboring Residents
Ave. Age (min./max.)	36.6 (19/63)	38.2	35.6	35.5
Sex female male	18 42	1 19	4 16	13 7
Ave. Yrs. Edu. (min./max.)	6.2 (0/17)	4.9	9.7	3.7
Origin San Juan del Sur Other Rivas Other Dept.	13 23 24	0 11 9	1 6 13	20 0 0
# of Children (min./max.)	3.1 (0/17)	3.4 (0/17)	2.1 (0/4)	3.7 (0/12)
Household Size (min./max.)	5.7 (1/13)	6.1	5.3	5.2
Cultivated Area	3.46	4.0	5.2	.5
Ave. Monthly Expenses (U\$)	\$195.94	\$201.33	\$181.06	\$204.95
Ave. Food Expenses (U\$)	\$116.76	\$94.46	\$103.07	\$150.08
Food as % of Monthly Expense	.63	.59	.60	.69

While the purpose of this paper is not to compare differences between these groups, there are some quick differences to note. First there is the gender bias in the

sampling. Very few women work at the plantation, and the hotel is predominantly male as well. However, in carrying out the household interviews I encountered far more women. Interviews were carried out during the day and in many cases the patriarchs were working outside of the home. In many case however, woman lived alone. A second key difference relates to the educational levels of the hotel being double those in the plantation, and nearly triple those seen in the resident households. While low educational levels were seen in the hotel among cleaning and maintenance crew, those hired to work in the restaurant need some English speaking ability and their inclusion is primarily responsible for the higher educational levels at the hotel. This corresponds directly to lower numbers of children.

Third, the areas under cultivation are remarkably lower among the local residents. This is presumably due to tourism developers buying up much of the available land in the San Juan del Sur area. Poverty often forces the rural poor to sell off parcels of their land when critical expenses arrive. Those with regular salaries in the hotel and hacienda are better equipped to deal with such expenses. Also as evident in the table, hotel employees, as well as hacienda staff to a certain extent, are far more likely to hail from other departments beyond Rivas. In those from other regions the pressure from developers does not exist. While a more in depth discussion of the differences between groups is beyond the scope of this article, I present these differences here to provide a clearer image of the origins of the nnnnnnnninformation that will now be presented.

Looking Behind the Green Curtain

This research is ethnographic in nature, meaning it “focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation” (Babbie 2001: 281). While one of my intentions was to understand the phenomenon of ecotourism as local Nicaraguans experience it, I unavoidably carried certain expectations of ecotourism into the field based on exposure to scholarly writings and previous experience working with other ecotourism projects. While a consensus definition of ecotourism continues to elude scholars, (Diamantis 1999; Sirakaya, Sasidharan, and Sönmez 1999; Fennell 2001; Hunt and Stronza 2009), Honey (2002) has identified some common features one would expect to see in most if not all ecotourism projects:

- a) Travel to natural areas that are often remote and usually protected;*
- b) Active contributions to conservation;*
- c) Economic benefits and political empowerment for local communities;*
- d) Respect for local culture and support for human rights;*
- e) Education about the environment, society, and culture at the destination; and,*
- f) Minimal impact on the environment and local people.*

Members of the Ponçon family, who often arrive at Morgan’s Rock in helicopters, have the capital means whose unavailability often limits other ecotourism projects. Due to the extent that they claim in their marketing to have modeled itself after the highly-acclaimed Lapa Ríos, boast of their accomplishments in the promotional materials, and receive extensive praise in the tourism and other popular media, I initially anticipated particularly high performance from Morgan’s Rock. This was not to be the case. A description of the activities of Morgan’s Rock with respect to the economic, environmental, social, and ethical aspects of ecotourism follows.

Economic Sustainability

Salaries at Morgan's Rock are abhorrently low. Many of the demanding, manual labor positions, such as gardening, maintenance, cleaning, and kitchen, offer salaries of approximately \$150/month, or \$5/day. For many of the employees, the four monthly vacation days involve long public bus rides home to be with family. By the time a meal or two is taken along the way, as much as 25% of their monthly earnings are spent on this trip home and back. Food expenses average just over 59%, leaving approximately 15% of their income for all remaining expenses such as medicine, schooling, clothing, utilities, rent, etc. When asked what he would like to do with his future earnings, a member of the cleaning staff responded "Unless my wages go beyond what they are now, I won't have any income. I don't have any money to buy anything else – just the food, it isn't enough or anything else," and another states "there is no perspective (of the future). We have no hopes of improved salaries. Here we only break even."

English-speaking wait and bar staff, receptionists, driver and in particular guides can make significantly more, especially through tips, though these are supposed to be pooled. The tip boxes can be opened only by staff from the main administrative offices in Managua who arrive monthly to take a share of the tips. This is a cause for much concern among the staff. They feel that it is their efforts during tourist visits that are directly responsible for earning these tips, and that staff from Managua who already earn well should not be entitled to them. As one restaurant worker puts it, the tips "have nothing to do with Morgan's Rock."

The hotel workers were also refused a basic gift basket, which is commonly given to employees during the holidays in formal jobs in Nicaragua. Yet they all live in dormitories on the premises and can be called to work at any given time. One employee explains “..the perspectives of the employees are not considered. There are many things that disrespect the workers. I feel sincerely exploited and that my work is worth more than they pay me. When there is extra work at night, we still have to go and there is nothing to compensate us or any recognition whatsoever.” Another hotel employee expresses her frustration this way “The say we are privileged to work here. We have asked for other benefits. There are delays in being paid, sometimes three days while our families have to wait for the money. They also do not help us with transportation, with no solution to that problem. We have lost some benefits too (referring to the gift basket). They tried to reward us with this exercise machine that nobody uses. The tourists bring donations for the children but they don’t even help the children of the employees!” As another states, “Here you do your job well and they don’t even thank you, they don’t value us at all. They don’t have the volition to tell us ‘good job.’ Not even a basket of basic grains. The large part of the staff is aware of this. When you do something bad they call you over and fine you. You do something good and they don’t say anything.” This sums up issues contributing to an overall lack of spirit and a feeling of under-appreciation among hotel staff.

According to the hacienda administrator, during the initial development of the tree plantation on the current Morgan’s Rock premises, primarily local residents were employed in the clearing of land, the making of roads, and the planting of saplings.

Later interviews with 20 local resident households confirmed eight had members who had previously worked at the tree plantation. However, the administrator claims the local residents were ultimately unable to abide by the rules and regulations of the job including conservationist policies that prohibit hunting or harvesting of flora and fauna. These employees were also distracted by the proximity of their homes and too often were tempted to return to their families and return to work late. Job opportunities in Nicaragua are scarce and working conditions severe (Marquette, 2006). This contributes to the willingness to travel for work (Gindling, 2008). As a result, Morgan's Rock has had little difficulty in recruiting staff from other areas of Nicaragua - "Here there is no one from right around here working at Morgan's Rock. We are from León, other places. The locals do not see any benefits from Morgan's Rock, only the dust that blows up when they go by with tourist." Of the 45 hotel employees surveyed, only four were residents of the municipality of San Juan del Sur, while 26 come from not just other municipalities but from departments other than Rivas. The plantation had a similar pattern. Of the 20 plantation employees interviewed, only one was from the municipality of San Juan de Sur and eight were from other departments. By all indications, this importation of labor for both the hotel and hacienda stand in direct conflict with the marketing information on the website, which clearly states that Morgan's Rock is involved in "creating a sustainable development project that will help the local community by offering employment and education."

While the administrator claims this in effect removes much of the temptation to wander off the property, others at the hotel understand that this policy gives them "more

control over the employees.” It also does not diminish the cabin fever nor deter employees from wandering off the property. One evening I was recruited by a group of eight or so employees for an after-dinner, off-trail hike through the woods and off the property in order to blow off steam at a nearby beach and small thatched roof bar. After many hours, the return required negotiating not only the secondary forest and tree plots of the Hacienda in the dark, making it clear that my two flashlights played a key role in my recruitment, but also avoiding detection by the armed security guards who patrol the property nightly. Fortunately, a former Sandinista captain with several years of work experience at the plantation helped lead the way safely back to our dormitories. In other instances, employees that live “relatively” close to Morgan’s Rock would make a 4-5 hour bike ride home to spend one evening with their families. Obviously the practice of employees wandering off the property to visit families or simply for a change of scenery continues among non-local employees. This lends more credence to the explanation provided by the hotel employees - “since we live here they have more control over the employees – they can call us to work at any time – there is more availability yet they don’t pay us overtime for such things.”

Environmental Sustainability

The Morgan’s Rock website claims it is a project of reforestation and agro- and ecotourism “at its best”. They succinctly explain the differences between reforestation and tree farming and explain that both are practiced at the Hacienda, leaving the casual reader to believe equal effort is invested in both. While they claim to have reforested

more than 100,000 trees in an effort to restore local ecosystems, a closer reading reveals that 1.5 million exotic tropical trees have been planted in the name of tree farming. For every tree dedicated to reforestation, fifteen are dedicated to future harvests. While guides confirm the total lack of primary forest, the promotional materials again continue to assert that “endangered primary forest wilderness” is being protected.

In 2004 Ecoforestales, S.A. became the only Nicaragua firm to earn a Smartwood Certification from Rainforest Alliance. Developed in 1993, this certification is designed to ensure sustainable forestry, conservation of biodiversity, equity for local communities, fair treatment for workers, and incentives for businesses to benefit from economically responsible forestry practices (Morgan’s Rock, 2009; Rainforest Alliance, 2008). By creating a demand for certified timber products, the Smartwood program seeks to alleviate pressures on illegally extracted tropical hardwoods. Ecoforestales, S.A., the corporation to which Morgan’s Rock belongs, has received the Smartwood certification for 22 species being cultivated at four sites throughout Nicaragua. As would be expected given the descriptions offered earlier of the treatment of employees and lack of local involvement in operations at Morgan’s Rock, the initial evaluations were quite low with relation to the training, knowledge, and responsibility imparted onto the employees (Rainforest Alliance, 2005). Yet the Smartwood title was still imparted under the condition that improvements are made in those and other areas. However, in a more recent 2008 audit, the certification was suspended for failure to comply with several conditions, including the training of employees, use of banned pesticides, failure to

identify areas of high conservation value, lack of monitoring, and failure to adhere to the management plans (Rainforest Alliance, 2008).

The property does contain a governmentally decreed private protected area - a 300 hectare private forest reserve formally titled “El Aguacate.” This reserve is located along the estuary emptying into the horse-shoe bay of Ocotal Beach. A purportedly key element of ecotourism and sustainability at Morgan’s Rock is “protecting wildlife and reintroducing nearly extinct animal species into the private reserve.” Current employees who pre-date the opening of the hotel verify that no animal re-introductions have taken place. Although marketed as an effort to protect ecologically significant wetlands, the ethnographic process eventually revealed quite a different motive for the private reserve. No less than 1000 of the property’s remaining 1500 hectares are dedicated to single-species tree farming plots, a land use little different than agriculture in its intensity, Figure 1 illustrates. While details are virtually illegible in this scanned property map, noteworthy here is the amount of the property dedicated to single-species tree plots, represented by the colored areas. With the remaining 500 hectares dedicated to agriculture, fruit trees, grazing, roads, administration areas, and the premises of the eco-lodge, it is apparent that the estuary was given protected status only because the salty, marshy land is wholly unsuitable for the planting of any marketable exotic woods, the primary land use at Morgan’s Rock. This contributes to the widespread belief among staff, residents, and even foreign tourists and operators that the interests of the owners of Morgan’s Rock are vested in tree farming long before ecotourism or biodiversity protection. One hotel worker concluded “It is a lumber business. They don’t maintain

the forest in a natural state. They plant only to export. There are 200 manzanas of recently cut forest right now.” Another restaurant employee notes “they are cutting down trees to exploit the wood. If they are ecological how can they cut down trees?” Even local residents who have never set foot on the property are aware that “they cut the wood that has no value so they can plant the valuable species.”

Meanwhile I regularly observed workers pruning and clearing underbrush in the tree plot areas while riding in vehicles or while walking alone on areas of the property (Figure 6). These plot maintenance activities ensures regular disturbance and prevents their functioning as long-term habitat for wildlife. On several other occasions, while accompanying the plantation administrator and one of the tourist guides in areas of the property rarely visited by tourists, I observed workers slashing and burning regenerating secondary forests in order to plant the marketable woods. The administrator explained to me that they had difficulties with their plantings and were forced to start over. Not wanting to erode the good will and confidence he had demonstrated with me, I waited for him to depart to ask the guide to clarify what we had seen. He said he couldn't, and that on the several occasions during his three years of working as a guide for Morgan's Rock he encountered such cutting while leading tourists. “I have tried explaining it all kinds of different ways but there is just no way to make it look good.”

On another occasions I was chatting with staff in the reception area, where the radio used for communication with the plantation is located. Not aware that I might be there to overhear, the administrator called over to the hotel and explained to the young

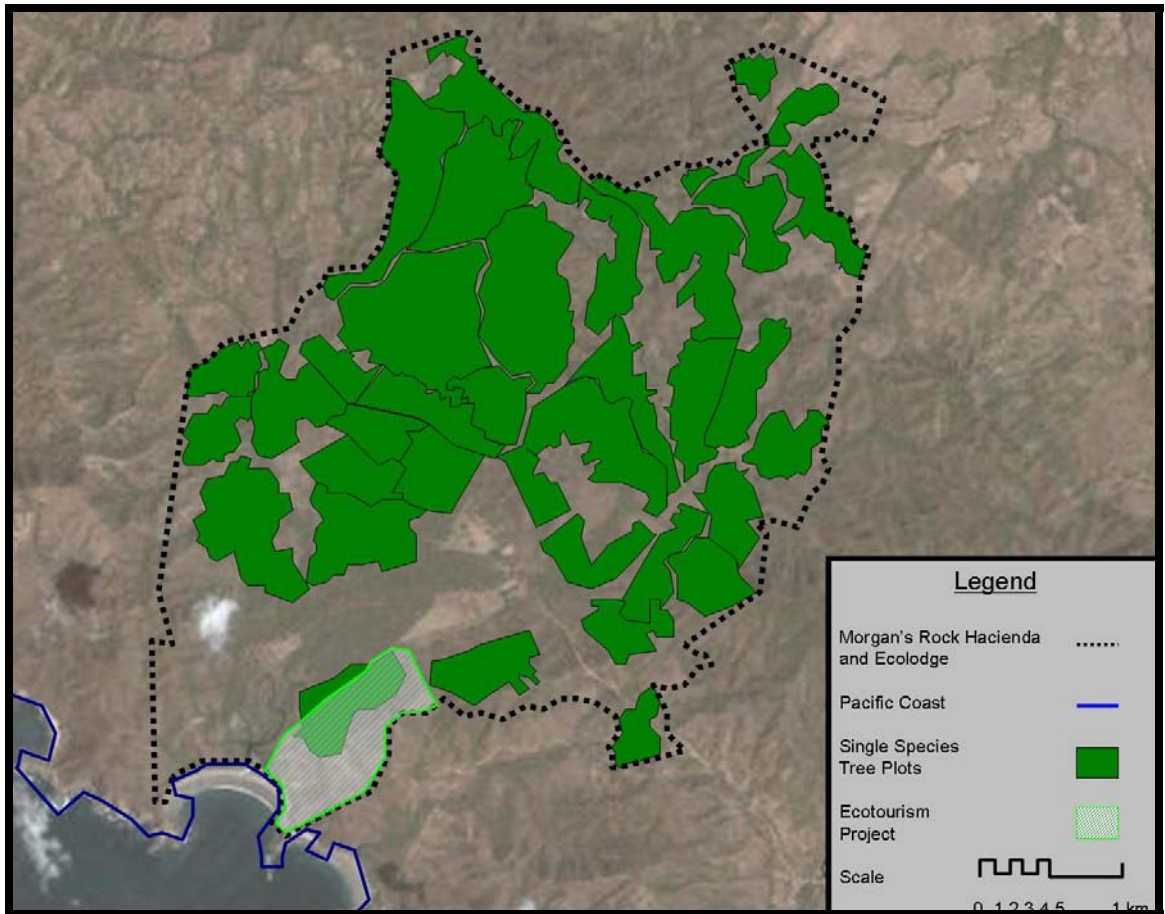


Figure 6. Morgan's Rock Property Map
 Colored Areas Represent Single Species Tree Plots
 (source EcoForestal, S.A.)

man working in reception that morning that they would be burning in a certain area of the property that day, alerting the staff to be careful about planning any tourist activities in that areas. He went on to instruct the hotel employees to cover up the burnings by explaining to any inquisitive tourists that the smoke coming from these on-site burnings

was actually originating on the property of unscrupulous neighboring residents preparing their lands for planting. Blushing, the man working reception looked at me and shrugged, saying sarcastically “here we are all ecological.”

Finally, despite the claimed efforts to contribute to sea turtle conservation, the electrical lights, such as those on the pathways leading to the beach, and others glowing in the bungalows overlooking the beach, have long been documented to have a disorientating effect on nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings (Mann, 1978 Witherton, 1992; Lutcavage, Plotkin, Witherton, and Lutz, 1997). This design is in clear violation of even the most basic sea turtle conservation practices. Clearly, active contributions to biodiversity conservation remain of secondary importance at Morgan’s Rock.

Social Sustainability

Schevyns (1999) describes forms of empowerment, or disempowerment as the case may be, that can result from ecotourism. The empowerment framework she presents has four components: economic, psychological, social and political. Morgan’s Rock is a major failure on all four accounts. Rather than lasting economic gains resulting in community improvements, Morgan’s Rock is responsible for little if any cash gains for the rural residents living in its vicinity. With the exception of a few locally employed individuals, profits are siphoned off entirely by outside elites. Locals have no invitation to, nor avenue for, participating in ecotourism. This is partly due to lack of tourism-related skills, yet Morgan’s Rock also makes no efforts to train or equip them for such work.

Locals are likely to have experienced reduced access to important woodland and coastal food resources, and as Schevyns describes, are “confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the initiative” (1999: 247). This quote from a nearby resident exemplifies this frustration “We cannot even cross to the next beach. They have shotguns in there everywhere at night. Supposedly the beaches are public (property), but they don’t let us pass there. The Poncón must have friends in the government. What they do is barbarous, gross. They pass by here everyday. I tried to go collect some crustaceans on the next beach over and they shot at me. I had to climb into the woods to hide from them. They have an enclosed river that is full of shellfish, and a shrimp farm, but they don’t let us take anything, us poor people. What nerve! That is farmed shrimp - for export. Nothing for the poor people.” Morgan’s Rock is so un-involved in the local community that even the disharmony often associated with unequal distribution of benefits doesn’t take place for the simple reason that no one at all is benefitting. In the token social projects that Morgan’s Rock undertakes at the five local schools and the annual road trash clean-up (see later section), the residents are treated like passive beneficiaries, with no say whatsoever over how or why the project operates the way it does. Even worse, their influence on the schools serves to extort some into participating in the clean-up, as one concerned mother notes “They trick them into collecting trash with a little cookie and a soda. If my kids don’t collect trash, they don’t get good grades on their tests.”

When residents make requests to Morgan’s Rock to share its electrical lines so they can have power in their households, they are completely ignored. As one woman

notes, “the people don’t have wells, water, or electricity. There are so many of us woman who are alone. We don’t have the skills to make latrines.” During the construction of Morgan’s Rock it was necessary to install power lines because the area had not previously been served by the power grid. For this reason neighboring residents had never had electricity in their homes, something nearly every interviewed household desired for their home; yet, as one resident explains, “they have electricity but they didn’t run the line through here next to the road and for that reason we still don’t have electricity.” Rather than installing their power lines along the road where dozens of local households would be served by its installation, the owners decided to run a separate line through an unpopulated forest, away from inhabited areas, thus depriving the community of electricity and avoiding an opportunity to contribute substantially to the development of the local residents in a way they themselves have specifically identified.

Morgan’s Rock also removed access to forest and coastal resources, which previously served the needs of local residents. While removing access or discouraging environmentally damaging behaviors is a common practice, the project has made no effort to provide any compensation for this lost access. One resident describes what this loss of access means to many local - “a lot of people go around looking for something to survive on, an armadillo, and they just can’t. The guards are walking around. Even just to feed themselves they cannot hunt. That is big, huge!” Since virtually no neighboring residents are currently employed there, they have little incentive to abide by Morgan’s Rock’s rules. As a result, hunters trespass nightly in order to access the important sources of subsistence that no longer exist outside of the Morgan’s Rock property such

as iguana, armadillo, and deer. In their efforts to curb these activities, the Hacienda administrator has often requested local police arrest trespassing hunters. On one occasion, this led to the death of an unarmed peasant hunter, an unfortunate incident that has been well-communicated among local residents, as evidenced in the following pair of quotes, “There was a man looking for something to eat in the woods in there with his dog. They shot him, under (plantation administrator)’s orders” and, “That poor family lost their son, their husband.” Even security guards working at the plantation admitted “We carried weapons and we would set up ambushes just like we did during the war.”

Lastly, Morgan’s Rock has a token relationship with five local primary schools, where tourists often visit to distribute supplies brought in their suitcases. Typically these are notebooks, pens and pencils, erasers, and occasionally backpacks. While these are an obvious assistance to the schoolchildren, these materials are relatively easy to acquire in Nicaragua, and may in fact be less expensive there than in the tourists’ countries of origin. One mother explains the fate of many of these donated items – “And when they come with donations, the teachers collect everything and the kids end up with nothing....the teachers take things and then say ‘they were stolen’. All the kids know the teachers takes things...you think we don’t know they steal things. Of course they do.” Meanwhile the requests for assistance to dig wells in order to provide drinking water to the schoolchildren seem to fall on deaf ears. Another mother notes “In the school there is no well. They began to make one but never finished it. The people asked them once again for a well and they were told NO. They denied us that assistance. That was more than two years ago.” Morgan’s Rock has to date declined to invest in these

efforts, seemingly content with the public relations and photo opportunities provided by the distribution of the above-mentioned school supplies.

Ethical Issues

Some researchers argue for the inclusion of a fourth dimension of sustainability into tourism - ethics (Wight, 2007). As I will describe now, certain questionable practices at Morgan's Rock provide justification for this inclusion. As noted previously, during the two months of on-site participant observation, it became clear to me that much of the promotional materials of the project were highly exaggerated. Their website claims "*Some* of the products we use are organically grown and raised at our Hacienda including a variety of fruits and vegetables, milk, cheese, eggs, lamb and even our own brown sugar" (emphasis added). They continue with a description of their irrigation system "rice, corn and wheat are the most important grains harvested in the hacienda. These grains, as well as all the vegetables grown in the hacienda, such as tomatoes, cucumbers or zucchinis are watered by this ingenious irrigation system". Despite these claims, during my time at Morgan's Rock I witnessed no vegetables or grains being cultivated on-site, organically or otherwise. Employees confirmed this was not the case. Rather, nearly all vegetables were driven to the project in pickup trucks multiple times a week. On several occasions I assisted with the unloading of these items. On another occasion I accompanied a driver to Morgan's Rock head office, *Simplemente Madera* factory, and *Ecoforestales, S.A.* warehouse on the outskirts of Managua. On our return our large king-cab pickup was loaded to the brim with sides of

beef and numerous canned or jarred food items. Clearly much of the food does not originate on the premises of Morgan's Rock.

According to guides who have worked at Morgan's Rock in the Hacienda and during construction prior to the opening of the hotel, there has never been organic produce or grains cultivated on site in order to supply the hotel. Likewise, the organic shrimp also farmed on-site, which Morgan's Rock claims will be "completely transparent when cooked and taste superbly clean and delicious. These will probably be the cleanest, freshest-tasting shrimp you will ever savor" does not meet organic standards. According to the finca administrator, the shrimp are instead fed an export quality commercial feed which makes them export quality. The marketing materials for Morgan's Rock are clearly deceptive with respect to the origin and nature of the foods served at the hotel, as a restaurant employee points out "they say the sugar is made in the finca and it isn't. They say the milk is from the finca and it actually comes in a can. The shrimp that they supposedly farm here are very few or many times there are none so they buy them. The fish are not always caught on-site." Tourists are obviously investing little energy in verifying the claims of Morgan's Rock, which perhaps explains why these deceptive practices have been in place for more than three years now.

The sugar and rum mill described on the website has also been in-operational since the lodge's first season. This is supposedly due to the difficulties encountered in cultivating sugar cane on the property. Ironically, Rivas is located in the heart of one of the largest cane producing regions of Nicaragua. Another common feature of many ecotourism projects in the tropics is a butterfly farm, though again Morgan's Rock's

farm was not operational. Staff claimed that it was a seasonal operation only, though many other projects in other areas of Nicaragua and Costa Rica maintain live specimens year round. Blue Morpho butterflies, arguably the most charismatic of all tropical butterflies, are also regularly seen darting along the creek-bed walks, further evidence that the non-operating butterfly farm is simply a lack of commitment to its maintenance on the part of Morgan's Rock. Yet the project continues to advertise these elements on the website despite the fact that in some cases these activities have been out of operation for several years. While not a major ethical breach in and of itself, this deceptive practice still contributes further to the body of ethical issues.

Absolute Trees in a Relative Forest: Harsh Socio-economic Reality and the Tourism Context in Nicaragua

In the previous section I presented ethnographically gathered information to speak about Morgan's Rock's failure to adhere to common ecotourism standards. This has resulted in a very bleak portrait of the project. However, the notion of ecotourism is not a Nicaraguan one, and it therefore necessarily involves the imposition of Western constructs of nature, biodiversity, communities and conservation as West and Carrier (2004) have noted. As I reflected on the socio-economic, historical, and political factors specific to the Nicaragua context where Morgan's Rock operates, I made an effort to depart from this externally-derived, "absolute" perspective. As I took these contextual factors more fully into account over the course of the research, I was able to re-frame my analysis with a more "relative" perspective. Rather than placeless, external standards of

scholarly conceptualizations of ecotourism, this evolving perspective relies even more on the local voices of those most affected by Morgan's Rock to provide the criteria for evaluation of this project, as others have suggested (Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). Thus I began to critique my own initial critique of the project, and came to different conclusion about Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. Here I describe these contextual factors.

Nicaragua has never been a high profile tourism destination. Although accounts of the volcano lined landscapes, massive lakes, dense rainforests, and friendly people have lured travelers since the 19th century writing of Ephraim George Squier, visitation to Nicaragua continues to remain below that of its Central American neighbors (UNWTO, 2006). Under the Somoza family dictatorship from 1936-1979, the city became the most developed in the region, though as a tourism destination it served primarily a den for vice (Mowforth, Charlton, and Munt 2008). This came to an abrupt end when the city was literally leveled by an earthquake in 1972 which resulted in a loss of 10,000 lives (EM-DAT, 2009). The Sandinista Revolution followed a few years later in which 50,000 Nicaraguans lost their lives (LOC, 2007). The socialist government of the 1980s remained openly suspicious of tourism and its development was discouraged. Given the open conflict between the Sandinistas and the Contras which resulted in another 30, 865 dead (Nicaraguan Ministry of the Presidency, 1990, in Walker, 2003), discouraging it was not a difficult task. Tourism was reduced to solidarity brigades and medical missions. A few years after the end of hostilities, another major setback in the form of a natural disaster struck Nicaragua in 1998. Hurricane Mitch made direct

landfall in the country killing 3.332 people and leaving 19% of the countries population homeless (EM-DAT, 2009).

As a result of these natural and unnatural disasters dating back to the 1970s, the economic situation in Nicaragua reached abyssal lows it has yet to recover from. Today in Nicaragua, 45.1% of the population lives on less than \$1 per day, while a staggering 79.9% live on less than \$2 per day (UNDP, 2005). The Gross National Income remains below \$1000 per year (2005). Incomes reaches a high in the late 1970s, but plummeted deeply during the Sandinista rule and counter-revolution of the 1980s. After neoliberal policies were re-enacted in the 1990s, average incomes have indeed climbed steadily in the 2000s, yet even today they have only returned to 1950s levels of purchasing power (Gapminder, 2009). Most appalling economically however is the tremendous disparity of wealth. The richest 10% of the population control 48.8% of Nicaragua's wealth, while the poorest 10% account for only 0.7%, representing one of the most extreme disparities in the world (World Bank, 2002).

Desperate to increase foreign exchange and improve its socio-economic situation, the country's stance towards tourism changed dramatically with the Sandinistas loss in the 1990 election. The new government of Doña Violeta Chamorro encouraged foreign investment and increased exports, thereby opening the country's arms to tourism (LOC 2007). It was aggressively promoted through numerous subsidies and tax advantages in Nicaraguan Law 306. Despite fears arising from the recent re-election of Daniel Ortega, a former Sandanista guerilla fighter and socialist president from 1985-1990, the current administration is openly embracing tourism as a means of

addressing poverty and obtaining foreign investment (Carroll 2007). The recent San Juan del Sur Resolution of the National Tourism Commission calls for the adoption of tourism as a national policy, further tourism infrastructure improvements, and laws to facilitate foreign investment in tourism within the country (ANN 2008). As shown by Table 2, by the end of the 1990's, tourism had begun to outpace the country's traditional exports to become the second foreign exchange earner (LOC 2007). Tables 3 and Table 4 show that between 1997 and 2007 tourist arrivals more than doubled and the revenues from them more than tripled (INTUR, 2008). All but absent during the socialist rule of the 1980s, tourism has only continued to separate itself in the 21st century. It now reigns as the leading export, surpassing traditional export heavy-weights coffee, sugar, shellfish, and gold (INTUR 2007). After skyrocketing to number one in 2001, it has remained there over each of the last six years (2007).

Table 2. Position of Principal Export According to Revenues Generated
(source: National Institute of Tourism)

Escala	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1	Café	Café	Algodón	Café	Carne	Café	Café	Café	Café	Café	Café	Café	Turismo	Turismo	Turismo	Turismo
2	Carne	Carne	Carne	Carne	Café	Carne	Mariscos	Mariscos	Mariscos	Turismo	Turismo	Mariscos	Café	Carne	Café	Carne
3	Algodón	Azúcar	Café	Algodón	Turismo	Mariscos	Carne	Turismo	Turismo	Mariscos	Mariscos	Turismo	Mariscos	Mariscos	Carne	Café
4	Banano	Algodón	Azúcar	Azúcar	Mariscos	Turismo	Turismo	Carne	Azúcar	Carne	Carne	Carne	Carne	Café	Mariscos	Mariscos
5	Oro	Banano	Banano	Turismo	Oro	Azúcar	Azúcar	Azúcar	Carne	Azúcar	Azúcar	Oro	Azúcar	Oro	Oro	Oro
6	Azúcar	Oro	Turismo	Mariscos	Azúcar	Ajonjolí	Banano	Banano	Banano	Oro	Oro	Azúcar	Oro	Azúcar	Maní	Maní
7	Mariscos	Turismo	Mariscos	Banano	Ajonjolí	Banano	Ajonjolí	Oro	Ajonjolí	Banano	Banano	Banano	Banano	Banano	Azúcar	Azúcar
8	Turismo	Mariscoo	Oro	Melaza	Banano	Algodón	Oro	Aioniolí	Oro	Aionioí	Aioniofí	Aioniofí	Aioniofí	Aioniofí	Friol	Friol

Table 3. Tourist Arrivals to Nicaragua 1997-2007
(source: National Institute of Tourism)

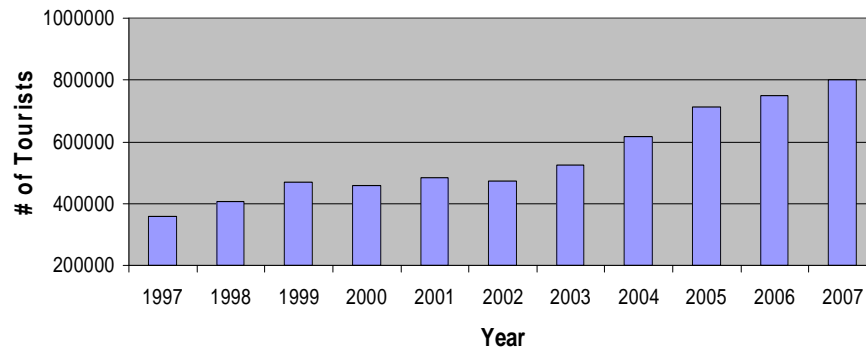
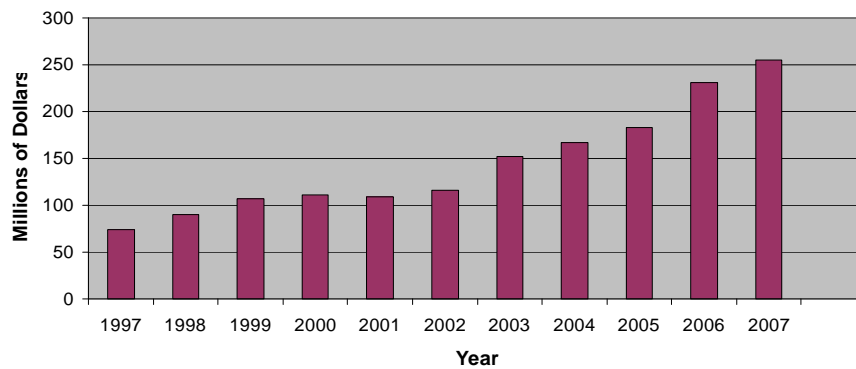


Table 4. Revenues from Tourism 1997-2007
(source: National Institute of Tourism)



Despite the new popularity of tourism in Nicaragua as evident in its seven-year reign at the top of the country's export list (INTUR 2007), and the massive amount of research on ecotourism coming out of neighboring Costa Rica, peer-reviewed research on tourism in Nicaragua remains virtually non-existent (one exception is Barany et al. 2001). This dearth is surprising since Nicaragua is well-positioned to pursue ecotourism

development. It shares a southern border with model ecotourism destination Costa Rica, has a larger area and lower population density, and offers an even greater natural resource base including Central America's largest expanse of protected rainforest. With this vast natural resource wealth, ecotourism appears to be a particularly valuable development tool for the country just as it has been among the country's neighbors. It offers an alternative to extractive industries, intensive agriculture, and more exploitive forms of mass tourism. Indeed this was suggested by Barany and others (2000) in their assessment of Nicaragua's private reserve network's potential to contribute to ecotourism development.

Although tourism is developing throughout the country, the focus of tourism development is the area between Managua and the coastal community of San Juan del Sur located near the southern border. Along the way the city of Granada sits off the shore of Lake Nicaragua, the world's tenth largest freshwater lake. In addition to the quaint colonial architecture of the town's main plaza, visitors can enjoy trips through the nearby islets where wealthy elites have built elaborate vacation homes, the larger island of Ometepe which is currently under considerations for one of the world's ten natural wonders of the world, or some of the nearby volcanoes including the panoramic Mombacho and active Masaya. Further down the coast near the border with Costa Rica are the white sand beaches located in and around San Juan del Sur. A sleepy fishing village a few decades ago, San Juan del Sur is been a long-time favorite among the international surf crowd. However, in the last several years the development of tourist infrastructure has risen dramatically. Cruise ships are arriving in increasing numbers

since 2000, and foreign dollars are now pouring into hotel, vacation rentals, and all-inclusive vacation home and resort communities. A Jack Nicklaus designed golf course is one of several courses currently under construction along the Nicaraguan coast (Nicklaus, 2009). In total no less than 70 resort, vacation home, and residential tourist developments currently exist along the 20km to the north and south of San Juan del Sur. Century 21, REMAX, and Caldwell Banker all operate offices there. Foreign capital is already having a powerful impact in the region, imposing Western values onto the Nicaraguan geographic and cultural landscape.

Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge Reconsidered

In light of these harsh socio-economic realities of rural Nicaraguan life, and the rapid, unchecked nature of tourism development taking place in the vicinity of Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge, in this section I now examines the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of the project through a different lens. As will be demonstrated, a perspective relative to the local conditions makes it far more difficult to consider the outcomes of this project as anything less than moderately successful.

Economic Sustainability Reconsidered

As one restaurant employee points out, "The greatest problem in Nicaragua is the lack of work." Between the Hacienda and the Hotel, Morgan's Rock does employ approximately 125 individuals at any given time. Even those earning at the low end of the pay ranges at these two operations are earning significantly above the national

averages. When 80% of the country survives on less than \$2 per day, an income of \$5 per day is quite substantial. Further evidence of the significance of such a salary is the fact that so many of the employees come from other departments. While having employees come from far away may have certain advantages for Morgan's Rock as already described, clearly the opportunity for a steady salary provides a strong incentive to the employees as well. As one puts it, "the salaries are bigger than in the fields. Back home we only earn a misery. Here is the tourist zone we earn triple. There we earn C\$30/day (approx. U\$1.60). Here we earn C\$100/day (approx. U\$5.25). It is a great source of work" and another states "My life has changed a lot. My job used to be more...a lot more difficult...and it wasn't permanent. It was six months at a time and afterward I would be without a job. Here I have gotten out from under that worry – the concern about money."

Employees' acceptance of the conditions of the work, which involves a 26-day shift each month and living far from family, indicates that Morgan's Rock is indeed offering opportunities for them to economically better themselves. In addition, several familial relations are present among the Morgan's Rock staff, and in some cases individuals have been close friends for many years in their home communities. Despite the complaints noted earlier about working conditions, fines, lack of bonuses and overtime pay, and overall feeling of under-appreciation in their work, the employees are making brothers and cousins aware of the opportunities at Morgan's Rock as they arise. Obviously if employees are leaving wives and children behind, and notifying friends and family members of openings, employment is a powerful incentive.

One explanation for this is the lack of employment alternatives available in Nicaragua. The economy has been primarily agricultural in nature for many years, focused on the production of labor-intensive crops such as coffee and sugar cane. Since the 1990s, free-trade zones filled with textile factories have been opened in and around Managua. Many employees have prior experience in these industries and some in both – “I never worked in a hotel until now. It is different because it is a continuous job. Before, I worked during the season in a sugar processing plant. The job only last four or five months. I also worked in the *zona franca* (free trade zone).” These forms of work also involves leaving the family and living in over-crowded, vice-ridden conditions, working long hours in difficult conditions, and regular yet still minimal wages. Referring to these conditions one employees explains “Where the work is back there, the treatment is not the same – it is bad. There are lots of bad habits, vices,...you have to work with vagrants.” One of the remaining options, which requires journeying an even greater distance from family is illegally entering Costa Rica to work in the informal sector there. This has resulted in Nicaraguan immigrants comprising 8% of the Costa Rican labor force, concentrated in low-status, low-paying jobs (Gindling, 2008). One woman told me “When I was young we ate only yucca and sour milk, and mangos for every meal. My father went to Costa Rica and they threw him in jail for being illegal....looking for work to feed the family.” She later adds “some go to Costa Rica – they think they are going to find money laying in the streets. I earn my salary with my sweat.”

From an economic standpoint it is also worth noting how well Morgan's Rock has integrated with other businesses in Nicaragua, albeit those owned by many of the same individuals. The tree plantation and tourism operations are fully integrated on the premises. In addition to export, the trees are used to build the luxury vacation homes at *Balcones de Majagual*, and in the construction of the beach resort *Pitaya Vaya*. Prospects for these projects are left for tourism perusal in the lobby of Morgan's Rock. Leftover pieces of wood are used in the making of furniture and household adornments at *Simplemente Madera*. Many of the decorative items in the lodge are available for purchase. Even the coffee cultivated at one of the country's largest coffee farms in Matagalpa is served and sold onsite. Given the advertising for all these related products and the interest in them that is created during tourist visits, at least a small portion of the revenues and the employment derived from them could potentially be attributed to the tourism at Morgan's Rock Ecolodge.

Environmental Sustainability Reconsidered

Equally prevalent in the interviews among hotel staff, hacienda staff, and neighboring residents is the fact that more animals exist on the premises of Morgan's Rock than do outside of the property. "I see it as beautiful, animals are cared for – that doesn't exist where I live. The children don't know many of the animals for that reason." This consensus exists despite the intensive agriculture, tree farming, cutting of secondary forests, lack of re-introductions, and absence of primary forest. One reason is the policy against all hunting persecution of animals. Inability to abide by these policies

was cited by the Hacienda administrator as the primary reason local residents no longer work at Morgan's Rock. Yet the neighbors too recognize the growing numbers of animals now finding refuge there, as evidenced by their nightly incursions onto the property to hunt iguana, armadillo, and deer. As one neighbor puts it, animals exist "there they have all kinds of animals. They look for refuge there – all the animals from this zone."

In fact, even for casual visitors it is visually obvious that animals exist in far greater numbers and in much closer proximity to humans on the property. One day repair technicians had to be called in from Managua to perform service on the hotel's laundry equipment. I happened to be riding back to the hotel in a vehicle when we came across the truck of the technicians stopped in the road. At first we thought they were urinating on the road side, and may indeed have been feigning to do so once they saw us approach. However, the driver of the vehicle I was traveling in was far better equipped to recognize the situation, and pointed out that the men were grabbing a few iguanas to take home while on their way off the property.

Iguanas are a delicacy for all Nicaraguans, and many restaurants in San Juan del Sur continue to cater to the demand when elites from the capital arrive in town on weekends and holidays. This demand can make the selling of animals to restaurants in town a more economically viable endeavor for those who previously hunted for subsistence. Ironically, the hunting pressure experienced at Morgan's Rock exists precisely because of the increased population of animals attracts hunters to the property. It thus serves as a perverse indicator of the conservation success of the project. The

motives may be questionable, but the fact remains that the estuarine areas, the 300 hectare private reserve and the 150,000 reforested trees have contributed to a higher concentration of wildlife and what employees refer to as a fresher, cooler micro-climate which many now miss in their own communities, clearly stated here “The preservation of the forest, the plants, the animals....That which they call ecotourism avoids contaminating the environment. Here in Morgan’s Rock ones sees the preservation of the plants and the animals – the pure air we are breathing” and here “even the climate has improved – it is cooler now because they are taking better care of the trees. Yes, there are many more.”

This may be particularly important since there is very little formal biodiversity protection in this region of Nicaragua. The only state-operated protected area in the department of Rivas is the *La Flor* Sea Turtle Sanctuary. It is one of the few pristine beaches remaining in Nicaragua where sea turtles come to nest in large numbers. Yet San Juan del Sur is peppered with signs offering excursions to the refuge, and it is therefore under nightly assault from flashlight bearing tourists during the nesting season. While it is illegal to hunt any animal without permission in Nicaragua, and sea turtles are “protected” internationally, finding turtle eggs for sale in town, either at the market or in non-tourist restaurants, is dishearteningly easy. One day while wearing a t-shirt that states “I do not eat turtle eggs” which I purchased from Flora and Fauna International to support sea turtle conservation efforts, the matriarch of the household where I had lived for nearly two months before and after living at Morgan’s Rock teased me by saying “I

guess I'll have to get a t-shirt that says 'I DO eat turtle eggs.'" She then proceeded to pull a bag of sea turtle eggs out of her refrigerator and dangle them in my face.

Social Sustainability Reconsidered

As is the case with economic outcomes, positive social outcomes of Morgan's Rock are essentially confined to those employed by the project. Yet there are notable changes at work. First and foremost, most employees of both the finca and the hotel, particularly those who did not have a steady income previously, note an improved sense of well-being. A reliable salary allows for a longer term outlook, budgeting for larger purchases or incremental credit payments, and less worry about the where and when the next income will arise, as noted in these comments "Before I used to work very little (there were no jobs). I never had any money for anything. Now I don't feel good necessarily, but I don't feel bad either. I feel better than before. The salary is not very good, but it is fixed, it is certain. I never had that before. What I don't have is the desperation of not having things. With a fixed income I can pay for the things."

Employees also seem to find a new sense of cultural pride from their work in tourism, as noted by a member of the cleaning staff "I am a peasant! It makes me proud that the guests value us, they make us feel good and we to them." Staff takes delight in explaining local customs, foods, and traditions to interested and attentive tourists – "In my case the advantage is getting to know what tourism is, the culture of other countries, the way people are treated. I have tried to understand why there are differences...the history...we exchange culture. The Nicaraguans give their own culture....I have

benefitted greatly from that.” The exchange is often two-way as well, as a hotel employee notes who has gotten “to know other people and cultures, from other countries – a German, a Canadian, an Arab – here I have seen and I have talked with them.” The habits and values of tourists also intrigue the employees. Even non-English speaking members of the cleaning staff were quick to recall and appreciate humorous incidents involving encounters with tourists in the cabins in which, neither able to speak the language of the other, communication was somehow achieved and the needed items provided or conditions changed – “Many of my co-workers have learned English, and we all know a few phrases and how to respond to them. It is a good school, after being a good job, it is a good school.”

While securing the stable employment was most certainly the initial reason for working at Morgan’s Rock, many staff members also note a greater appreciation for nature and reduction of destructive activities. One maintenance workers speaks to this issue “to keep up a forest, put in more plants, help the environment. Before that didn’t matter to me at all – with my machete I would cut any old thing. I thought protecting the environment was foolish. Now I see that it is a reality. We are going to have a desert here in a few years. The climate is changing. I used to grab the iguanas just for fun. Now I try to raise other people’s consciousness.” These comments echoes those of others who as children often threw stones at wildlife that would be considered charismatic to Western tourists, such as sloths, monkeys, and birds. By witnessing the different valuations that tourists have for nature, and having adherence to the conservatory practices of the project as a condition of the employment, workers have re-

considered their attitudes and behaviors towards wildlife. For most employees this is their first exposure to ideas of sustainability and eco-rhetoric.

Table 5
Frequency of Common Responses to the Question
“If You Could Change Something in Your Community, What Would It Be?”

	Finca	Hotel	Neighbors
Environment	8	9	1
Potable water	1	1	3
Trash	1	7	
Electricity	1	1	3
Roads	2	3	5
Poverty		2	3
Employment	2	2	3
Schools		1	2

While neighboring residents having no contact with the ecotourism activities were most likely to cite infrastructural improvements such as installing electricity, running water, or paving of the roads as the types of things they would like to change about their communities, Morgan’s Rock employees were more likely to mention environmentally-related issues, such as more trees, cleaner water, cooler air, and less trash. These responses are summarized in Table 5. This pattern provides at least a small indication that the changes in environmental ethics desired of ecotourism projects is in fact taking place at Morgan’s Rock, even in the absence of other empowerment opportunities.

Another interesting phenomenon is the unwavering support across all interviewed groups, for tourism development in Nicaragua and the reluctance to identify

anything bad associated with tourism or disadvantages of working in tourism versus other forms of employment. Even when interviewees recognized unethical practices at Morgan's Rock, certain destructive behaviors, loss of subsistence access, or poor treatment of the staff, they did not generalize these negative outcomes to tourism in general. This was equally true in hotel employees, tree plantation workers, and neighboring residents. Many of the latter are currently unemployed, suggesting that income is not necessary for creating support for tourism development. This could also be due to the common perception of tourism-related jobs as physically less demanding than alternatives in agriculture or *maquiladora* textile factories. At Morgan's Rock, room and board are provided, baseball equipment and an exercise machine made available for employees, and beach access recently granted during free time.

Last but not least is the tourist experience at Morgan's Rock. On this issue the project is an overwhelming success. The white-sand, horseshoe bay is truly breathtaking, as are the unique cabins. The array of activities available allows for a wide-range of tastes, from pure relaxation to adventurous volcano hiking or surf lessons. The project has set a new standard for up-scale, nature-oriented tourism, contributing significantly to the shift in the country's tourist image from dangerous war zone to undiscovered gem. To date, there is little to compete with Morgan's Rock in Nicaragua. On one end, other ecotourism projects are much more rustic and cater to a slightly more daring crowd who does not require all the comforts. On the other, high end resort hotels now litter the coast though few are making little if any efforts to address sustainability in any meaningful way. Perhaps this has led to a bit of resting on the laurels in terms of the

project's own adherence to the principles of ecotourism, yet any new attempts to develop ecotourism in Nicaragua will surely be judged against their current standard.

Discussion

As this article and others have point out, two “ecotourisms” exist (Wight, 1993). One ecotourism uses the eco-rhetoric to sell itself. It complies with standards, or in some cases lies about complying with them, only to the extent necessary to maintain the contentment of tourists during they few days that they visit. This is often referred to as green-washing (Honey, 1999). There is another ecotourism that is characterized as providing income and employment opportunities (Langholz, 1999; Campbell, 1999; Stronza, 2007), promoting an environmental ethic (Wunder, 1999; Stronza, 2007; Stronza and Pegas, 2008), and leading to enhanced sense of well-being (TIES, 1993; Schevyns, 1999; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). Ironically, Morgan's Rock Ecolodge and Hacienda fits both these descriptions.

These divergent perspectives placed me, the ethnographer, in the difficult position of trying to theoretically rectify the conundrum. Certification programs are promoted to ensure adherence to recognized standards, to denounce green-washing in order to “separate the wheat from the chaff” so to speak (Honey, 2008). Yet some scholars believe authentic ecotourism rarely if ever exists (Wheeler, 1991) and that the concept is too despoiled to salvage (Russell and Wallace, 2004). Others claim ecotourism in practice simply subordinates local perspectives to Western values of nature and community (West and Carrier, 2004). Even the founders of the International

Ecotourism Society admit that “none among us (and we were the committed of the committed) was hitting in our practices all that ecotourism means” (Christ, in Honey, 2008). Despite these issues, Honey (1999) warns us not to “throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

One of the purposes of incentive programs is to provide incentive to improve performance, and reward that performance with the awarding of a selected logo (Honey, 2008). But how do these programs deal with poor performance? Will sanctions be imposed for lack of adherence to ecotourism standard, as in the public denouncement of projects appearing on www.irresponsibletourism.info website? Even if Morgan’s Rock fails to hit all aspects of ecotourism in their operations, defaming them only serves to diminish the employment opportunities and income that 45 employees and their families currently depend on, and the reduce support for the biodiversity being protected in the private nature reserve there. Maybe the bathwater should not be thrown out just yet.

Perhaps the West is demanding too much of ecotourism. It would not be the first time the West became enamored with a concept, and much like any lover, exaggerating the ideals and failing to see the flaws. Redford’s (1991) described the notion of the ecologically noble savage to describe how special interest groups and conservation organizations placed dangerous burdens on indigenous communities to be “natural conservationists.” This “unjust and unrealistic” expectation usually furthers external agendas (Redford and Stearman, 1993). If the indigenous want to exploit their resources, or continue slash and burn agriculture, that should be their prerogative. At Morgan’s Rock, sustainable employment opportunities are provided, biodiversity is

being conserved to a far greater extent than in the surroundings, and there is evidence that an environmental ethic is promoted among employees. Beyond this, is it simply their prerogative how other resources are utilized on their private property?

Little evidence was found for empowering community development or outreach coming from Morgan's Rock. But given the socio-political history of Latin America and Nicaragua in particular, this should come as no surprise. In fact, this project could be more aptly characterized as *caudillo*-based conservation as opposed to community-based conservation. *Caudillos* were the heavy-handed political leaders, often with military backgrounds that ruled over much of the region during the mid-twentieth century, and Clemente Ponçon has established such an authoritarian presence among the local residents. If ecotourism funds are spread too thin in other projects seeking to hit on all aspects of ecotourism as Kiss (2004) notes, then perhaps Clemente Ponçon and his family are better off investing returns internally than they would be attempting to further community outreach, especially when local residents regularly sabotage conservation efforts by entering to hunt on the property. These community-less approaches draw parallels with the resurgent protectionist argument for people-less parks that some have argued for in the recent decade (Terborgh, 1999; 2000; Oates, 1999; Kramer, Schaik, and Johnson, 1997; Brandon, Redford, and Sanderson, 1998).

Conclusions

Ecotourism is grounded in the concept of sustainable development (Honey, 1999), popularly conceptualized by the Brundtland Report as having three equally important dimensions: the economic, the environmental, and the social (Brundtland, 1987). Yet the most popular and commonly cited definition of ecotourism is that developed by International Ecotourism Society, “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (TIES, 1990). This definition includes many vague concepts, including what constitutes responsibility, nature, or well-being in any particular context. In the present case, Morgan’s Rock can be considered a natural area, respondents’ comments confirm that it is conserving the trees and animals, and by providing steady work in a job-starved country, it is also contributing to the welfare for those working there. On the other hand, blatantly lying in the marketing materials, slashing and burning secondary forests and creating feelings of exploitation among workers is clearly not what the originators of this definition had in mind.

If ecotourism practitioners are to realize this concept’s potential as strategy for connecting conservation and development, the factors determining where, when, how, and why ecotourism is successful must be clarified. The purpose of this paper was to involve local perspectives in the evaluation of an ecotourism project in southwestern Nicaragua. As an ecotourism researcher well-versed in ecotourism discourse, my initial reactions to many aspects of Morgan’s Rock were very negative, and the ways I went

about collecting data and the data I collected reflect this. With time, and the realization that few if any employees of this project, or the neighboring residents, have any previous exposure to ecotourism rhetoric, and when left to their own devices, revealed many very positive outcomes relating to employment, on-site increases in biodiversity, and even increased environmental ethic. This led to a critiquing of my initial critique of the project. The existence of these two, equally valid perspectives reinforces the difficulties faced by certification programs.

CHAPTER III

RECONCILING TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM RESEARCH ON PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM

Introduction

Tourism studies began developing as a discipline several decades ago and has since grown into a sizeable field with numerous peer-reviewed journals and a substantial body of literature. One of the hallmarks of tourism research is the use of stage-based models to describe tourism destinations and local resident reactions to tourism. Doxy (1975) presented a four-stage Irridex to characterize resident attitudes towards tourism as moving from euphoria to antagonism over time. Butler (1980) later adapted product life cycle literature to tourism destination. This research describes destinations as moving from initial exploration to eventual stagnation phases. Dogan (1989), as well as Ap and Crompton (1993) presented later stage-based models that also showed a general worsening of local attitudes towards tourism as residents became more experienced with tourism. These scholars remain highly influential on current conceptualization of tourism destinations and the residents in them.

The research specific to ecotourism, and local resident reactions to it, suggests a much different relationship. While this research has at times originated in tourism journals such as this one (*Annals of Tourism Research*), a substantial portion of the body of research on ecotourism actually comes from other disciplines and is published in the relevant journals in those disciplines. These fields include but are not limited to

anthropology, geography, sociology, forestry, development studies, and conservation biology. In fact, one of the most highly respected, often-cited scholars of ecotourism, Martha Honey, has a doctoral degree in African *history*! While this diversity of perspectives brings many insights to the collective research, the development of unifying theory in ecotourism research remains a challenge. However, one promising line of research points to participation, particularly in decision-making as a key factor for positive attitudes towards ecotourism (Lindberg, et al., 1996; Campbell, 1999; Stronza, 2007; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). Conversely, lack of participation in decision-making is linked to ecotourism failure (Bookbinder, et al., 1996; Belsky, 1999). Higher levels of participation are linked to more favorable attitudes (Alexander, 2000) and increasing support for ecotourism-related conservation (Lindberg, et al., 1996).

While unifying theory from the tourism and ecotourism perspectives would appear to be a very fruitful endeavor, the lines of research in tourism studies related to participation in tourism currently stand in direct conflict with nascent theory in ecotourism research. It is in an effort to address this conflict that this paper begins with further review of traditional tourism theory related to local resident reactions to tourism development, followed by a discussion of writings ecotourism that address social aspects of sustainability. Then, recent ethnographic research on ecotourism in rural Nicaragua will be described and later discussed in the context of this previous scholarly work. In the current study, ecotourism and related tourism development are examined through the lens of local Nicaraguans involved in varying degrees with a prominent ecotourism operation located on the premises of a tree plantation and private nature reserve. Semi-

structured interviews were collected from individuals directly employed by the operation in tourism-related activities, individuals indirectly involved in tourism-related activities through their employment on the tree plantation, and local residents living adjacent to the property. This array of local perspectives creates an interesting portrait of tourism development along the Pacific Coast of southwestern Nicaragua and provides further support for certain aspects of existing theories while challenging others, thus facilitating a move towards the development of unifying ecotourism-specific theory.

Participation in Tourism: The Tourism Studies Perspective

Arnstein's (1969) eight-rung ladder of citizen participation has been influential to conceptualizations of participation in tourism. This continuum, seen in Figure 7, positions powerless citizens against existing power-holders and describes the relations that exist between them, which range from manipulation to full citizen control. Arnstein calls the lowest levels of participation - manipulation and therapy - non-participation since they are actually substitutes for participation. The objective here is for power-holders to "educate" or "cure" the participants of their opposition. The next three rungs on the participation ladder - informing, consultation, and placation - are referred to as tokenism since they allow citizens to hear and be heard, but the rights to decide still remain with the power-holders. The last three rungs - partnership, delegated power, and citizen control - represent actual citizen power. In these situations, citizens have the power to negotiate and engage in trade-offs, to obtain the majority of the decision-making seats, or to achieve full managerial power.

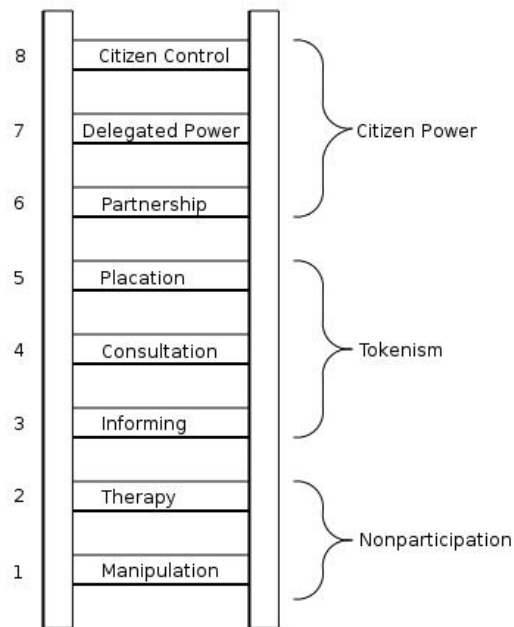


Figure 7. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

As Tosun (2002) points out, these stages, or step-based models are frequently applied to examinations of tourism impacts. In 1975, Doxey presented a four-stage model to explain interactions between hosts and guests in a tourism destination. This model suggests that over time the relationship of hosts towards guests moves from *euphoria* to *apathy* to *irritation* and eventually to *antagonism*. While simplistic in nature, Doxey's Irritation Index drew attention to the fact that all locals respond favorably to tourism development. Often mentioned in the same breath as Doxey, Butler (1980) applied the product life cycle model from marketing research to tourism destinations. This Destination Life Cycle model describes an evolution of tourism areas through the stages of *exploration*, *involvement*, *development*, *consolidation*, and *stagnation*, at which point the area either falls into decline or is rejuvenated. This model

also draws attention to the potential for opposition and discontent among resident populations.


Dogan (1989) further explored how residents adjust to tourism development. These strategies for adjusting to tourism include *resistance*, *retreatism*, *boundary maintenance*, *revitalization*, and *adoption*. Resistance and retreatism usually surface when the thresholds for touristic development are exceeded. Boundary maintenance involves balancing the interests of hosts and guests, with negative impacts of tourism nullified by economic benefits. Revitalization is a more common strategy where culture is the focus of tourism. Adoption may indicate a desire to use tourism as a vehicle for changing existing social structures or to assimilate Western culture. Dogan (1989) further explains how communities are often highly heterogeneous and therefore demonstrate different forms of adjustment within the same community. Likewise, strategies are not mutually exclusive allowing individuals to adopt different strategies depending on the context.

Ap and Crompton (1993) later proposed another stage model. In contrast to Dogan's (1989) study of tourism in indigenous areas, Ap and Crompton (1993) studied reactions to tourism in Texas communities where hosts and guests differed little from one another. This led to a four stage continuum: *embracement* (eager welcoming of tourism), *tolerance* (enduring tourism's negative aspects out of recognition of its contribution to the community's economic vitality), *adjustment* (scheduling of activities in order to escape tourists), and *withdrawal* (temporary removal of oneself from the community). Of note here is the fact that evaluations of impacts of tourism on an

individual level may differ from evaluations of tourism's impacts in the community at large. Ap (1992) utilizes social exchange theory to account for such differences between positive and negative perceptions of tourism. According to this theory, relations of power or dependence between individuals, and the perceived balance of exchanges between them, provide the basis for positive or negative perceptions of tourism impacts. Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) instead use altruistic surplus theory to explain how individuals tolerate negative impacts of tourism on themselves when they recognize positive impacts within the community. These ideas have rarely been applied to the developing country context. One exception is a study conducted by Clifton and Benson (2006) of ecotourism in Indonesia. Their evidence also supported the altruistic surplus theory over the social exchange theory, though the presence of high social capital was used to explain the emphasis on collective vs. individual benefits.

As Table 6 summarizes, tourism studies has established clear relationship based on a strong line of research. The models of Doxey (1975), Butler (1980), Dogan (1989), and Ap and Crompton (1993) all suggest that relations between hosts and guests tend to become more adverse over time, with more experience in tourism, and with increased participation in tourism. As will now be shown, this perspective is at odds with the scholarship relating to ecotourism.

Table 6. Overview of Stage-based Tourism Models

Citizen Participation	Tourism Stage Models				
Arnstein (1969)	Doxy (1975)	Butler (1980)	Dogan (1989)	Ap & Crompton (1993)	Time/Experience/ Participation in Tourism
<i>Citizen Control</i>					more
<i>Delegated Power</i>			<i>Resistance</i>	<i>Withdrawal</i>	
<i>Citizen Power</i>	<i>Antagonism</i>	<i>Stagnation</i>	<i>Retreatism</i>	<i>Adjustment</i>	
<i>Partnership</i>	<i>Irritation</i>	<i>Consolidation</i>	<i>Boundary Maintenance</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>	
<i>Placation</i>		<i>Development</i>	<i>Revitalization</i>	<i>Embracement</i>	
<i>Consultation</i>	<i>Apathy</i>	<i>Involvement</i>	<i>Adoption</i>		
<i>Informing</i>		<i>Exploration</i>			less
<i>Therapy</i>					
<i>Manipulation</i>					
<i>Nonparticipation</i>					

Participation from an Ecotourism Research Perspective

With the ushering in of the sustainability era following the publication of the Brundtland Report (Brundtland, 1987), tourism development began to involve more focus on community-driven planning and participation. Tosun (2005) points out that while participatory approaches to tourism development have been a common reality in developed countries since the early 1980's they are still slow to be adopted in the developing world. Often the techniques used to guide tourism planning in the developing world originate in the developed world, without proper effort to examine the socio-cultural, environmental, and political conditions that determine which planning approach to use, and even then, only arrive after tourism development has already proceeded for some time in an ad hoc fashion (Tosun and Jenkins, 1998). This has been shown to be true with ecotourism development as well (Campbell, 1999; West & Carrier, 2004).

Despite the promising rhetoric, scholarly reviews and opinions of ecotourism in practice are mixed. Scholars have criticized ecotourism for providing little economic incentives to conserve (Bookbinder et al., 1998), being less effective than utilizing the same funds for direct conservation and creating a dependence on external funding (Ferraro, 2001; Kiss, 2004), providing income that permits more efficient means of environmental destruction (Langholz, 1999), having environmental impacts on par with other forms of mass tourism (Gossling, et al., 2002), undermining subsistence agriculture (Hughes, 2001), and reinforcing existing inequities in communities (Belsky, 1999). Yet ecotourism has also demonstrated the ability to empower communities. (Stonich, 1998; Schevyns, 1999; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008), provide direct economic support for protected areas (Honey, 1999) as well as economic incentives to conserve biodiversity (Lindberg et al, 1996; Stronza 2007; Wunder, 1999), and support cultural revitalization (Stronza, 2008) in particular contexts. These contrasting conclusions demonstrate that our understanding of why ecotourism operations are successful in some situations and unsuccessful in others is still limited.

While criticisms do exist, a critical review of ecotourism research assures that there continues to be a consensus that ecotourism offers “a promising route for generating benefits for those living close to tropical biodiversity without undermining its existence” (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). One line of research revolves around the way in which people participate in ecotourism. Campbell (1999) in Costa Rica, Stronza and Gordillo (2008) in Peru, and Stronza and Pegas (2008) in Brazil all suggest that economic benefits, while necessary, are simply not sufficient for positive ecotourism

outcomes including biodiversity conservation. Wunder (2000) notes that when individuals discern income resulting from the conservation of biodiversity in the Cuyabeno Lake area in Ecuador, natural resource management takes on a “self-imposed rationality” leading to favorable outcomes such as enforced restrictions on over-hunting. That participation, particularly in management and ownership of ecotourism operations, is highly related to favorable attitudes towards an ecotourism project has been shown by Lindberg and colleagues (1996) in Costa Rica and by Alexander (1999) in Belize. Meanwhile, lack of participation was identified by Bookbinder and others (1998) in the Royal Chitwan National Park of Nepal, and in Belsky’s (1999) work in Belize, as leading to ecotourism failures. Ecotourism-related revenue sharing also enhances support for conservation, as Archabald & Naughton Treves (2001) demonstrated in Uganda and South Africa (Loon and Polakow, 2001). This conclusion is confirmed by Stronza’s work in southeastern Peru (2007).

Objectives of the Current Study

To summarize the literature reviewed above, the dominant tourism perspective claims that attitudes towards tourism development are a function of time and involvement in tourism, and while responses are not mutually exclusive and communities far from homogenous, the more time and experience with tourism tends to lead to less favorable attitudes to tourism (Doxy, 1975; Butler, 1980; Dogan, 1989; Ap & Crompton, 1993). However, based on the findings from ecotourism research, it would be expected that favorable attitudes towards ecotourism would be related to increasing

levels of participation, particularly in management and ownership (Lindberg, et al., 1996; Campbell, 1999; Alexander, 1999; Stronza, 2007). With ecotourism being relatively new phenomenon, how locals evaluate it over time could quite likely change. It is ironic that ecotourism success often catalyzes further eco- and other tourism development in surrounding areas. Local attitudes towards ecotourism may therefore be less homogenous in areas undergoing multiple forms of tourism development simultaneously. Data from a recent ethnographic analysis of local employee and resident responses to ecotourism in Nicaragua shed some light on these issues. The paper now turns to a description of this research in order to later shed additional light on the capacity of these theories to effectively describe ecotourism in practice.

The Research Context

This research was carried out in southwestern Nicaragua in the Department of Rivas. The department is composed primarily of a narrow isthmus flanked on one side by the massive Lake Nicaragua - the world's tenth largest - on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. The San Juan River connects the lake to the Atlantic Ocean. Only 20 km wide at the narrowest point, the Isthmus of Rivas was the most logical choice for the construction of the inter-oceanic canal. Due to political turmoil and tense relations between the U.S. and Nicaragua in the early 20th century, the canal eventually went to Panama. Nevertheless Rivas was destined to serve as a major commerce conduit. The strip of land is traversed by the Pan-American Highway, which connects central Nicaragua and the population centers to the north with the Costa Rican border at Peñas

Blancas. The most recent national statistics estimate the 2008 population of Nicaragua at 5.1 million, 1.3 million in the capital city of Managua alone (INIDE, 2007). The population of the department of Rivas is estimated at 167,139 (2007). It is composed of 10 municipal units, primarily rural in nature (63.2%). A large portion, 44,887 people, reside in the departmental capital and main commerce hub, also named Rivas. The twin municipalities of Altagracia and Moyogalpa comprise the island of Ometepe and account for 31,917 residents (2007). The fifth-most populous municipality of Rivas is San Juan del Sur, home to 15,347 inhabitants (2007). Ometepe and San Juan del Sur are two of the most visited tourist destinations in Nicaragua.

Due to armed conflict, political turmoil, and devastating natural disasters, Nicaragua remained virtually devoid of tourism well into the late 1990's. Yet in the last decade those problems have been largely overcome. Being the largest and least-densely populated country in Central America (a region already book-ended by two of the world's most recognized ecotourism destinations - Costa Rica and Belize), having the world's 10th largest freshwater lake, numerous volcanoes, white sand beaches, mountainous forests, and the largest tracts of protected rainforest in Central America, Nicaragua's natural resource base positioned it well to take advantage of this ecotourism boom. Standing as the poorest country in the Western hemisphere behind Haiti and having one of the highest foreign debt ratios, Nicaragua also desperately needed tourism as a foreign exchange earner.

As a result tourism has grown rapidly in Nicaragua. Between 1997 and 2007 tourist arrivals grew from 358,439 to 799,996 (INTUR, 2007). It has beaten out other

principal exports including beef, coffee, shellfish, and sugar for each of the last 6 years, accounting for U\$255.1 million in 2007 (INTUR, 2007). Tourism statistics for the municipalities are lacking. The number of lodging establishment and rooms available in the department of Rivas is second only to the capital city of Managua (INTUR, 2007). The seaside town of San Juan del Sur is currently undergoing massive tourism development including high end hotels, luxury vacation home communities, and cruise ship visits. In 2007, 13,570 tourists arrived on cruise ships. The area is also under assault from real estate speculators. The coastline to the north and south of San Juan del Sur is now littered with up-scale vacation home developments replete with Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses. Yet much of this development has come at the expense of impoverished locals who have been lured to sell their properties by full cash payments. Some families, including those without running water or electricity in their dirt-floored homes, continue to negotiate these drastic changes from the fringes of the multi-million dollar developments. Tourism is arriving in force.

Methodology

Study Site

The research focused specifically on Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Eco-lodge, located 40 km from San Juan del Sur, and within two hours of both Managua and the Costa Rican border in automobile. Opened in 2004 on the property of an existing agro-forestry operation, Morgan's Rock is comprised of 15 luxury cabins located on forested bluffs overlooking a secluded white sand beach. This eco-lodge is part of an 800 hectare

private nature reserve and 1,000 hectare tree farming and reforestation program initiated by a wealthy family of French origin, residents of Nicaragua for several decades and owners of one of the country's largest coffee plantations. Native charismatic wildlife at Morgan's Rock includes black-mantled howler monkeys, two-toed sloth, green iguanas and black ctenosaurs, occasional sea turtles, and a plethora of tropical bird species. A sugar mill, organic shrimp farm, dairy farm, butterfly farm and certified wood program are all described in the promotional materials. Along with wildlife viewing hikes in the nature reserve's dry tropical forest, Morgan's Rock offers estuarine kayaking, a traditional artisan fishing experience, visits to the sugar mill with a rum tasting, horseback riding, therapeutic massage, yoga classes at sunrise and sunset, and excursions to other sites of interest nearby.

The project was modeled after the highly acclaimed Lapa Ríos eco-lodge located on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, and claims to be "a project of nature conservation, community development and reforestation offering Agro- and Ecotourism at its best" (www.morgansrock.com). It has received much praise in popular media outlets including the New York Times, Condé Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, American Way, The Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, CNN, and also recently served as the location of a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition photo-shoot. These descriptions served as the basis for selecting Morgan's Rock as a publicly-recognized exemplar of ecotourism to serve as the basis for the present research.

Data Collection

I conducted the field work component of the research over a five-month period between January and June of 2008. One month was spent in the town of San Juan del Sur securing room and board, getting orientated, identifying key informants, and gathering preliminary information. In the initial month, I identified two former employees of Morgan's Rock and performed informal interviews with them. Also during this month, I fortuitously received permission from the Morgan's Rock administrator to relocate to their employee quarters for the second month of fieldwork in order to facilitate access to informants and to allow fuller participant observation of the lodge operations. By request, and with the permission of the employees, I was able to extend arrangement for a second month. During the first few weeks of this "inside" phase, research activities consisted primarily of reconnaissance of the facilities and participant observation of employees' and tourists' daily activities. During the second month, semi-structured interviews were carried out with hacienda staff and with hotel staff. In exchange for this access to the inner workings of Morgan's Rock, I assisted members of the guide, reception, and restaurant staff with English classes.

The remainder of the time in Nicaragua I focused on gathering additional interviews from the neighboring households living nearest in proximity to Morgan's Rock. This involved near daily trips of up to 50 km from San Juan del Sur, and extensive walking along the roads surrounding Morgan's Rock. The passing of Tropical Storm Alma briefly delayed the gathering of these final interviews. During this last month, site visits were made to additional tourism related projects the owners of

Morgan's Rock are currently developing, including luxury vacation homes designed in the style of Morgan's Rock cabins, and the groundwork for a future beachfront resort hotel. This provided a clearer understanding of their approach to tourism development and the sustainability of their business practices.

Participants

Depending on the season, Morgan's Rock hacienda employs approximately 85 people at any given time. Meanwhile, the hotel component employs only about 45. Both sets of employees live on the property, though interaction is minimal. There are two separate living areas each with several dormitory-style cabins. Living conditions and food are distinct. For the interview portion of the data collection, I selected a convenience sample of 20 hacienda employees and 20 hotel employees to participate in the semi-structured interviews. The interviews typically lasted from 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours. I conducted the interviews outside of the employees' normal work hours, and interviewees were paid U\$10 for their participation. In addition to these interviews, simple descriptive information was gathered on all 45 employees of the ecolodge. Hotel employees included members of the cleaning staff, kitchen staff, wait staff, drivers, and maintenance workers. Hacienda employees included tree planters/pruners, irrigationists, livestock hands, a mechanic, two boat captains, a garbage man, and assistant administrator. Later, I also visited the 20 local resident households most proximate to Morgan's Rock and conducted similar semi-structured interviews with the head of household, or, if not present, their spouse.

My intention in gathered 20 interviews from these three groups was to represent three levels of involvement in tourism. Employees of the ecolodge represent the highest levels of involvement in tourism. Workers from the tree plantation on the property work in close proximity to tourism and in some cases interact with tourists (e.g. boat drivers, security guards). While they are on an entirely different payroll and live under different living conditions at another location on the property, their work activities and their employment itself depends at least indirectly on tourism. Ironically, no local resident I interviewed are currently employed at Morgan's Rock. However, but living adjacent to the property, they also represent a level of involvement in tourism, albeit primarily passive involvement. It therefore seemed logical to expect the attitudes associated with increased involvement and participation to be most present among the ecolodge employees, less so among the plantation workers, and least present among local residents.

Results

Group Characteristics

One ironic aspect of Morgan's Rock relates to the origin of its employees. As seen in Figure 7, only one hotel employee interviewed is from the municipal region of San Juan del Sur (additional surveying of the entire hotel staff revealed this was not a sampling issue. Out of 45 employees, only 3 are from San Juan del Sur!). A full 65% come from other departments of the country. This phenomenon of importing the labor was also noticed in the plantation, with 45% of those interviewed coming from other

departments. Obviously since Morgan's Rock is located in this municipality, 100% of the neighboring residents are from San Juan del Sur.

These differences in origin aside, the groups are similar in many respects. Highlighting some of those here increases the confidence that the differences reported later can be attributed to different levels of involvement in ecotourism. As seen in Table 7, very little difference exists between average age, household size, or monthly expenses. Plantation employees on average were slightly older than hotel employees and neighboring residents, though in the case of the residents this could certainly be due to the sampling bias explained later. Household size was slightly larger among the Finca staff than in the other two groups.

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Table 7. Group Descriptive Information

	Overall	Hotel Employees	Finca Employees	Neighboring Residents
Origin				
San Juan del Sur	21	1	0	20
Other Rivas	17	6	11	0
Other Dept.	22	13	9	0
Ave. Age	36.6	35.6	38.2	35.5
Sex				
female	18	4	1	13
male	42	16	19	7
Household Size	5.7	5.3	6.1	5.2
Cultivated Area	3.46	5.2	4.0	.5
Ave. Monthly Expenses (U\$)	\$195.94	\$181.06	\$201.33	\$204.95
Ave. Food Expenses (U\$)	\$116.76	\$103.07	\$94.46	\$150.08
Food as % of Monthly Expense	.63	.60	.59	.69
Ave. Yrs. Edu.	6.2	9.7	4.9	3.7
# of Children	3.1	2.1	3.4	3.7

The most notable differences are education and food expenses. Hotel employees on average have nearly double the years of education as those from the plantation, and nearly triple that of the neighbors. This corresponds with the lower number of children among hotel staff. Food expenses are approximately 50% higher among local residents. The majority of hotel and plantation workers come from other departments, and their money is sent back there to feed their families. Thus that money is spent on food in

other departments where tourism is uncommon. Since other characteristics are not drastically different between groups, the most logical explanation for the increased costs of basic food items in the San Juan del Sur area is the prevalence of tourism in this sector of the country.

Morgan's Rock Ecolodge

When I asked about how Morgan's Rock should use their earnings to help the community, hotel employees shared many strong opinions. While their thoughts as to what could be done in the community covered a wide range of suggestions, all responses indicated a feeling that Morgan's Rock is currently not doing enough. "That road cleanup is nothing! They just have to turn around and do it again next year. The idea is to NOT have to do it!" In fact, some employees describe the work that is being done in the community as due more to the efforts of the tourists than to the owners or administration of Morgan's Rock, "I think that the little they do does not reach the depths of the community. There are tourists that help, but the hotel doesn't do anything. They could make a road, and educate about the trash, the contamination, the deforestation – be more connected with the citizens." Still another adds "It would be better if the people who receive the materials knew where they came from. Morgan's Rock acts as if they came from them." And finally "Here there are infinite necessities – of houses, of food, of improving the schools, the means of communication. They could look for part of these, but we haven't seen that here. It more appropriate to say the guests do it, the recycling here. From the hotel no one does it."

Other reported perspectives suggested more ecologically constructive ideas, such as “give incentives to the neighbors so they would clean up their surroundings.” A few daring malcontents asked why money and materials were being given away in the communities when no appreciation or bonuses were given to the workers or their families, “The tourists bring donations for the children (in the schools) but they don’t even help the children of the employee,” or “for us that have kids, give us whatever it might be – notebooks, pencils – for the kids.” These individuals view charity in the community as mis-guided since it is the employees who are working to ensure a pleasant visit. Overall the hotel employees are quite critical of Morgan’s Rock on this issue.

When asked what the good things about tourism are, 48 out of 60 respondents noted the economic aspects, the words employment, money, or investment appearing in nearly every response. Yet the comments of one hotel employee encapsulate how those opportunities exist for some and not for others – “It (tourism) generates a lot of money. The people come from abroad to be here. Here (at Morgan’s Rock) they don’t give anything to the community. They (the community) are illiterate – they can’t even conjugate their Spanish much less their English. All the people from right outside of Morgan’s Rock, they are not trained or educated – they don’t have a chance. Perhaps over in the finca, but not here (in the hotel)!” Even within the hotel staff, inequalities exist, “There is different treatment between the strata of workers here. There is no equality...those closer to the boss have more options. Those that work in reception have access to the computers. They are prohibited for the rest of us.”

Yet hotel employees for the most part report an improved sense of well-being coming from the regular work in tourism. Several reported feeling more rested, less exhausted, less “beat-up” at the end of the day than in previous lines of work in coffee, sugarcane, the maquiladoras, or in a sawmill as one worker remembers – “(here) the workers are not so exhausted, like working in wood – there is a lot of pressure, sawdust, a lot of noise from the machines that does damage to the nervous system. Here you only hear birds and monkeys!”

Many employees also draw attention to the fact that tree farming is not reforestation – “now the deforestation is not ecological or conservation. It is a lumber business. They don’t maintain the forest in a natural state. They plant only to export. There are 200 manzanas of recently cut forest right now.” One goes so far as to say “It is a pretty place, very relaxing. But sometimes I feel like it is a fraud. They say many things that are not true, and we worry about the tourists finding out.” A second concern related to the treatment of the staff, a system of fines that exist, the lack of a bonus, the general lack of appreciation for the efforts of the employees leading to feelings of exploitation – “..sometimes there is injustice. One has to be here and put up with whatever because there is so little work to be had. They charge us, they fine us for the trash - whether it is clean or not – there are fines. It is not fair. C\$100 in the kitchen or the bathroom. I see it as unfair.” In light of these negative issues, only half of those working directly at eco-lodge would like their children to work at Morgan’s Rock. Most cited the desire for more for their children or the unjust treatment of employees as the reason for not wanting their children at Morgan’s Rock. Those in favor desired to have

their family closer to them, felt that other work opportunities in the city were more dangerous, or that tourism was an industry “with a future in Nicaragua.”

Across the board these employees feel that tourism is something good for Nicaragua, as these two employees note - “It is a source of employment. Without tourism there is nothing,” and “If it weren’t for the foreign investors, who knows where we’d be. Just five years ago there wasn’t any work at all. The country needs tourism.” Respondents also had a hard time describing what attitudes and thoughts towards tourism were ten years ago, highlighting its novelty in Nicaragua. Combined with the favorable attitudes towards tourism in general, this seems very consistent with the step-based models coming out of tourism studies and suggests that Nicaraguans are still in a honeymoon phase with respect to tourism in their country.

La Hacienda at Morgan’s Rock

Those working at the finca didn’t necessarily see their work or themselves as involved in tourism. While tourists are seen daily passing through the finca administration areas on their way to and from the lodge and en route to activities in other areas of the Morgan’s Rock property, the finca employees contrast their own exposure to tourism with the direct contact those working at the lodge have - “Those guys hardly have any duties, and yet they get everything, the tips,....We get nothing. They come over here to buy their sodas and stuff. If we do that, it doesn’t leave us anything to send home!” And another states “Only for them are there advantages. They have better salaries, their credit cards, tips, bonuses. Tourism in Nicaragua is good, there is

circulation of money because of it.” Still another explains “unlike us that work outside the hotel, they have an income from the outside (tips),...the salaries are better. The others on the plantation don’t have the right to visit the hotel.” Irrespective of these attitudes, nearly all plantation workers, 18 out of 20, would like their children to work at Morgan’s Rock. Those responding negatively desired something even better for their children.

The universally positive attitude toward tourism seen in the hotel is also seen here – “here tourism is what gives us a job. Here there is no development – tourism is the only thing.” Several reported feeling more relaxed than before, when it was never known where the next paycheck or meal was going to come from. One worker describes this, “It is nice having a fixed salary. You know everyday that you are going to work. For most others, when there is a storm or when there is rain, they can’t work and so they don’t earn anything.” One worker that comes from León contrasts the situation, “Here is very different than in my town. Here there is a lot of tourism. It is fundamental to the way of life here. A large percentage of the people live from tourism – artisans, fishing guides, boat captains, hoteliers, transportation, etc.” Even where workers see themselves as working on a tree plantation rather than in tourism, they fully support tourism’s collective benefits to the Nicaraguan community at large.

Those working at the tree plantation felt that what Morgan’s Rock was doing in terms of taking tourists and the school supplies brought in their luggage to nearby rural elementary schools as a very good practice that should be continued - “they take them clothes, notebooks, they take the tourists there for visits.” A status quo perspective is exemplified in the following quote, “there is nothing else they should do – it is doing

well.” In fact 13 out of 20 respondents from the plantations mentioned the schools in their responses. In addition to continuing to work with the schools, one progressive individual suggested “an extensions service that helps a group of peasants with training in animal husbandry, horticulture, in order to offer their organic products to Morgan’s Rock.” My sense was the Finca workers felt obliged to present Morgan’s Rock in a positive light, perhaps for fear that negative comments could lead to reprisals or the loss of their jobs. While some additional suggestions were offered, noteworthy here is the total lack of criticism towards what Morgan’s Rock is already doing, as seen above among the hotel staff.

While the positive attitudes towards tourism seen at the tree plantation are consistent with many of those seen among the hotel staff, wholly absent are the negative commentaries and feelings of exploitation. This is despite the full recognition of inferior salaries and working conditions at the plantation. By all indications, this group, which is less directly involved in ecotourism, demonstrates less negativity towards Morgan’s Rock and tourism in general.

Morgan’s Rock from the Outside

The responses of neighboring residents reflect their highly impoverished state. They identified basic necessities such as food, potable water, electricity, or healthcare. One put it quite simply “help the poor, however they can – we can’t be picky!” The words of these two interviewees express an resentment at the unusual custom of employing individuals that hail other departments when work is desperately needed

among the neighboring residents, “Give us jobs. One of the first things would be a job. Then improve the houses that are all rotted,” and “Employ some people from around here. They bring in people from the outside. Work! Give us some work!” One neighbors sums up her involvement in tourism - “For the ones that go to the coast, it is pretty there. There is a lot of traffic for the beaches. For us there is nothing good about it. There are two trucks that pass, in the morning and in the afternoon. Sometimes they don’t come.”

Yet Morgan’s Rock has offered most of them very little, resulting in sharp contrasts of opinion. Only one respondent was unable to correctly identify the owner of Morgan’s Rock, and during that interview a family arrived later that did correctly identify Ponçon as the owner. In the surrounding households, the opinions towards Morgan’s Rock and the owner Clemente Ponçon are stronger still. He is seen regularly passing by in his Land Rovers, or flying over in helicopters, and to the residents this exemplifies the grotesque disparity of wealth in the country. It was during these questions that sympathy was expressed for a young hunter who was killed while “looking for something to eat” at Morgan’s Rock when authorities were called in to apprehend him, “that poor family lost their son, their husband.” Referring to the finca administrator, this interviewee stated “he doesn’t come around here. He knows better. Only in his truck does he pass by here. He would end up dead if he came without it.” Another states of Morgan’s Rock “I only think about how to remove it from here.” There were a couple of residents who claimed, despite the absence of any benefits for them personally, that they held no ill will towards Morgan’s Rock. For the most part

however, many neighboring residents possess strong negative attitudes towards Morgan's Rock, typified by the comments "I don't know what it is. It is not very nice because it doesn't benefit us, it doesn't give us work. I don't feel good about those people."

It also surfaced during this questioning that often times the supplies delivered by tourists to the elementary schools are often taken away from the students by their teachers once the Morgan's Rock vehicles pull away, either to be sold or keep for their families. "They take things to the schools in boxes and the teachers keep it all – nothing for the kids!...they need that help, but teachers keep it – nothing makes it to the kids." One child sat nodding as his mother told me this story, one of several women to share it. Among all interviewees, residents have been the most negatively affected by Morgan's Rock. Rather than being highly critical, they are more aptly described as exasperated with Morgan's Rock. They are not offered employment, and the token community-outreach efforts are sabotaged by unscrupulous schoolteachers.

In a question about whether or not they would want their children to work at Morgan's Rock, an apparent reversal of attitudes is reflected among the residents - 75% said "yes" they would like their children to work there, citing mostly economic and employment reasons. It became apparent that interviewees recognize that those who have been best able to benefit from the employment opportunities in tourism in Nicaragua to date are those with more education, often including some computer training and English language skills. By desiring that their children work in tourism, respondents

were by default desiring that their children be well-educated. The data here support a strong relationship between educational level and degree of involvement in tourism.

Certainly one of the most surprising findings of this research relates to the paucity of negative comments about tourism. While the unemployed neighboring residents so blatantly chided by Morgan's Rock at times expressed disdain for the owner Ponçon, at no point was resentment in any form expressed towards tourism development in general. They continue to support it even when it has cost them reduced access to important subsistence resources, displaced many families, made usable land scarcer, and increased costs of living. Though few have had any opportunity to take advantage of the tourism development that has engulfed their municipality over the last decade, they recognized it as being good for the economy, and for those working in tourism, and that it has changed the country. When I followed up with questions soliciting information about the bad side of tourism, few negatively toned responses were offered. Some even seemed baffled by the questions, as though asking what the *bad* things about tourism were made no sense, as in the only bad thing was not having enough of it. Even in the few responses highlighting negative aspects of tourism, people still conclude that tourism is good, as in "I don't think there is any bad in it. But the prices climb. Everyone talks about dollars (instead of Nicaraguan *córdobas*). They keep selling the land. Nothing is left for the people here." In a region so severely depressed socio-economically, the introduction and rapid development of tourism is indeed seen as a bit of a savior – "it is what brings the most earnings to our country."

Individual vs. Collective Benefit

In their support of the altruistic surplus theory, Clifton and Benson (2006) suggested that high levels of social capital were responsible for an emphasis on collective vs. individual benefits. Given the support for the altruistic surplus theory provided here, a high degree of social capital is anticipated. Analyzing responses related to these issues is problematic for several reasons. First, education again appears to be a confounding factor. This allowed well educated youth from the hotel more opportunities to participate in group activities via clubs and school-related organizations, while the predominately under-educated finca staff and neighboring residents reported very little in the way of collective action. Exceptions usually involved group work activities such as repairing roads, sewers, and wells, all related to maintenance of a basic needs. Second, the hotel employees come almost exclusively from other regions of the country. While more examples of social capital building collective action were reported, along with feelings of control and impact on their communities, much of this seems to pre-date involvement in tourism. Since they now live on-site for 26 days out of each month, opportunities to participate in community affairs are severely limited. Collective action is also diminished by the highly politicized nature of the country, divided between Sandinistas and Liberals. When one party's candidate is in power, the programs for that party's supporters are pushed through, leaving the opposition supporters in the cold until the next administration change. These political divides have contributed to internal conflict for well over 100 years in Nicaragua, and to date tourism appears to have made little headway in overcoming these differences.

Discussion and Conclusions

Research in tourism studies has suggested different ways that locals can react to tourism development. Doxy (1975) developed an “Irridex” based on locals’ level of experience with tourism. Butler (1980) characterizes differences based on the stage of tourism development in the destination. Dogan (1989) described different levels of adjustment to tourism. Along with the research of Ap and Crompton (1993), these writings suggest that local residents’ responses to tourism become increasingly negative over time. Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) utilized the altruistic surplus theory to explain positive evaluation of tourism from individuals who are negatively affected by tourism development. Tosun (2002) later addressed these issues in the context of developing countries. In contrast, some of the research on participation in ecotourism emphasized increased participation (Alexander, 1999), particularly in management and ownership (Stronza and Gordillo, 2008), as a key factor for project success, empowerment (Schevyns, 1999), and positive conservation outcomes (Lindberg, et al., 1996), just as the absence of participation contributes to project failure (Bookbinder, et al., 1996; Belsky, 1999). While the ecotourism literature indicates increased participation leads to more favorable attitudes towards ecotourism, the traditional tourism literature suggests increasing involvement leads to a worsening of attitudes towards tourism. These bodies of literature are at odds with each other, and the need exists to reconcile the traditional tourism perspective with the research emerging on ecotourism.

This study represented an attempt to address both these lines of research using data from an ethnographic analysis of ecotourism in southwestern Nicaragua. While this

particular ecotourism project offers very little in the way of employment opportunities for local residents, and virtually no opportunities to participate in management or ownership for the current employees, most of whom hail from other regions of the country, overall support for tourism was very high among those directly employed in ecotourism, those indirectly involved at the incorporated tree plantation, and also among local residents. This was particularly interesting since these local residents have endured many negative impacts associated with tourism development in the area, including loss of access to subsistence forest and coastal resources, land displacement, and increased cost of basic commodities and services.

There was strong negative sentiment toward the specific ecotourism project among neighboring residents. Few of these residents work directly in tourism, and since opportunities for participation in ecotourism are not being offered to these residents, this initially seemed to support existing lines of research claiming that lack of participation in ecotourism, or inequitable distribution of benefits, would lead to less favorable attitudes towards it. However, a strong majority of these same residents stated they would like their children to work at Morgan's Rock. Despite the negative impacts mentioned above, and the antagonistic attitudes towards the owners of Morgan's Rock, residents and hacienda employees were still very likely to support their children working there. This appears to strongly support the altruistic surplus theory applied to tourism development by Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) rather than to the social exchange theory proposed by Ap (1992). Yet present study found very little support for social capital in Nicaragua, few examples of collective actions, and highly polarized political allegiances

to explain this emphasis on collective benefits as Clifton and Benson (2006) noted in Indonesia. In this context, social capital does not effectively explain the support for tourism's collective benefits even in the face of negative individual impacts.

For the time being, the perception of and attitudes towards tourism in Nicaragua also seem more consistent with the stage-based models. Given the near total absence of tourism in Nicaragua during the civil war of the 1980s and its rapid development since 1990, the San Juan del Sur region appears to be in the stages of *Euphoria* (Doxy, 1975), *Exploration/Involvement* (Butler, 1980), *Adoption* (Dogan, 1989), or *Embracement* (Ap & Crompton, 1993). This is evidenced by the universal support for tourism development in general. Those with more direct employment history in tourism were somewhat more likely to exude negative values including feelings of exploitation, disappointment with the ecological practices of Morgan's Rock, biding of time in order to leave for more desirable employment, or in a couple of cases, interest in using their experience to obtain better positions in tourism elsewhere. These responses are characteristic of later stages in the model such as *Apathy/Irritation*, *Development*, *Boundary Maintenance/Retreatism*, or *Tolerance/Adjustment* respectively.

The research on participation in ecotourism was not supported as directly as the tourism models, yet it was not necessarily refuted. Since those working at the ecolodge were not offered opportunities to participate in management, decision-making, or ownership, this appears to partially explain the negative attitudes towards the project and its owners. Residents, who are for the most part denied employment opportunities, were likewise more prone to exhibit negative attitudes towards Morgan's Rock. Thus the

quality of participation continues to play a significant role. Without opportunities for participation beyond entry-level employment, attitudes between lodge employees and residents are relatively comparative on many topics. This is despite large differences in educational levels between the two groups.

This is where the relationship between these two lines of research can be clarified. In early phases of tourism development, new economic opportunities, whether assessed individually or collectively, dominate the perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development. Yet as exposure to tourism increases over time, the deficiency of opportunities for equitable and empowering participation in decisions related to tourism development among local residents and employees leads to the more negative reactions seen in the stage-based models. The recent introduction of tourism to this region of Nicaragua means tourism and responses to it have yet to move beyond the initial “honeymoon” phases of the step-based models. Yet there are already small indications coming from the hotel staff that with their increasing experience in tourism, particularly when no opportunities for further development or participation is offered, their attitudes have shifted, perhaps their expectations have increased, and many have begun to exhibit negative attitudes towards the ecotourism where they are employed.

CHAPTER IV

REINFORCING CYCLES OF CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND IMPOVERISHMENT LEADING TO ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Introduction

The rapid spread of tourism is highly linked to the ideology of free trade and economic globalization, and the associated spread of capitalist relations of production (Mowforth, et al., 2008). Tourism has been promoted as a driver for economic development in developing countries for decades (de Kadt, 1979; Carbone, 2005; Hawkins & Maun, 2007), and as a result has grown into a top-five export for 83% of countries, and the number one export for 38% of those (Christ, et al., 2003). As early as the late 1970's researchers also began to explore tourism's potential to contribute to biodiversity conservation (Budowski, 1976). However it was not until the publication of *Our Common Future* that tourism was re-conceptualized with sustainability in mind (Burndtland, 1987). As in other development arenas, the new focus on sustainability in tourism was based on the premise that economic development does not necessarily come at the expense of environmental and socio-cultural concerns (Beckerman, 1992). While there have been efforts to implement sustainability into all forms of tourism, the ecotourism niche in particular is seen as an ideal mechanism for creating economic development which also supports biodiversity conservation and improved socio-cultural well-being (Ziffer, 1989; Boo, 1990). Supported financially by large NGOs and funding agencies (Kiss, 2004; Hawkins & Maun, 2007), and seized upon by several governments

(Mowforth, et al., 2008) ecotourism emerged rapidly in the 1990s as a popular means of implementing sustainability in tourism. It quickly became the fastest developing sector (Weinburg, Bellows, & Eckster, 2002) of what is now the world's largest industry (WTO, 2007).

Latin America is where ecotourism got an early start (Honey, 1999), and where ecotourism activity continues to be arguable the largest in scale and diversity (Stronza, 2008x). The region is one of several currently undergoing a "globalization crisis." Despite the related imperatives of globalization (e.g. privatization, deregulation, neoliberalism, and free trade) that attempt to reverse decades of squandered development opportunities (Keeling, 2004), mass poverty persists and has in fact increased in terms of percentage and absolute numbers compared to 25 years ago (Loker, 1996). As Loker states, "poor countries require access to foreign capital as a prerequisite for the economic growth that is the necessary, but not sufficient, condition for reducing poverty" (1996: 70). Due to this desperate need for foreign exchange, few national planners in developing countries devote the time and effort required to ensure the goals of alternative forms of tourism, including ecotourism, are met in such places for risk of losing investment (Tosun, 2005). Even when dedication to the principles of sustainability is present, the resources for carrying it out often are not. As a result, tourism development, especially in rural areas, often proceeds in an ad hoc fashion (Campbell, 1999) with host communities typically having little choice in becoming a destination (Cater, 1994; Stronza 2001; West and Carrier, 2004).

Scholars have claimed that in nearly every region of the developing world, persistence of poverty can be traced to an exhaustion of natural resources or to underdeveloped economies (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987). When this poverty is coupled with natural disasters, growing consumption rates in the First World, and increasing population pressures everywhere, developing countries cannot resist the temptation to allow rapid exploitation of their non-renewable resources in order to overcome these difficulties, though this simply results in further land degradation (Painter & Durham, 1995). To the extent that it confronts the issues of poverty, inequality, and the related exhaustion of natural resources, tourism may serve as a significant force for development in Nicaragua and elsewhere. Far more common in the developing world however, is tourism development sans planning, which favors the interests of local elites and affluent foreigners (Tosun, 2000; 2005). In these situations even meager gains in local employment, income, or nature conservation may not enough to offset the rising cost of living, diminished access to resources, and loss of subsistence labor among the poor created by the commercial production of tourism. The resulting land conversion and capital accumulation among the economically advantaged perpetuates, and in some cases worsens, existing inequalities just as it has in the disastrous development programs of previous decades (Painter and Durham, 1995).

Some scholars have claimed that ecotourism has the ability to break up the vicious cycles seen in previous agricultural development programs (Durham, 2008). While ecotourism has been able to accomplish this in select cases (Stronza and Durham, 2008), other researchers have shown that ecotourism can exacerbate existing inequalities

(Belsky, 1999; Stonich, 1998; Carrier and MacLeod, 2005). By furthering the wealth divide, ecotourism may thereby contributed to the same vicious cycles outlined by Painter and Durham (1995). Others scholars believe ecotourism is extricable linked conceptually, operationally, and spatially to larger processes of conventional tourism (Kontogeorgopolous, 2004). Weaver (2001: 112) goes so far to claim ecotourism “can be, and usually is, a variant of mass tourism.” Still others point out that ecotourism and other alternative forms of tourism represent only a small portion of the total tourism product (Jafari, 2001). When ecotourism is embedded in larger processes of conventional tourism, and represents a drop in the bucket of the overall offerings as these scholars suggest, can it still contribute to poverty alleviation, reduce inequalities, or conserve biodiversity?

This paper explores these issues in the context of the tourism development currently taking place along the southwestern coast of Nicaragua. It is based on field research between January and June of 2008. The research focused on a specific ecotourism project operating in this region of Nicaragua since 2004. Along with participant observation, semi-structured interview were conducted with individuals working and residing at an up-scale ecotourism hotel, their cohorts at the integrated tree plantation, and local residents neighboring the project. Resulting ethnographic data indicate that the ways that local people perceive and react to the focal project are inextricably linked to regional processes of more conventional resort and residential tourism development. These processes are highly related to those seen in political ecology research on the outcomes of agriculturally-oriented development programs in

Latin America (Painter & Durham, 1995). A conceptual framework outlining self-reinforcing cycles of capital accumulation and impoverishment put forth by Durham (1995) to describe the environmental consequences of these agricultural development programs in Latin America will be shown to accurately describe the environmental and social impacts of tourism development in southwestern Nicaragua. Rather than serving as a vehicle for breaking such vicious cycles, ecotourism is indeed following in the footsteps of previous failed development initiatives by contributing to increased environmental destruction, widening of existing inequality gaps, and further relative impoverishment of the vast majority of residents in region of Nicaragua.

In the next section I present in more details the scholarly writing on political ecology that guides this paper. This culminates with the introduction of the conceptual framework used to illustrate the vicious cycles mentioned briefly above. Then, I discuss the methods employed to gather the data, give background information on Nicaragua and the study region, and finally introduce the ecotourism project that served as the focus of my research. In later sections, I use ethnographic and secondary data to elaborate the elements of the conceptual framework to show how ecotourism is embedded in larger processes of tourism development and contributing to increased inequality in Nicaragua. I conclude the paper by further contextualizing this work with pertinent scholarly literature.

Political Ecology Theory

Political ecology is an approach to research that “necessarily revolves around a clarification of the impact of unequal power relations on the nature and direction of human-environment interactions in the Third World” (Bryant, 1997: 8). Combining the approaches of human ecology and political economy, political ecology traces its origins to the 1970s and came of age in the 1980s with the publication of Blaikie and Brookfield’s 1987 book *Land Degradation and Society*. These authors claim that the persistence of poverty can be traced to an exhaustion of natural resources or to underdeveloped economies (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987). This increasing poverty further tempts developing countries to exploit their natural resources, creating a vicious cycle of degradation (Painter & Durham, 1995). Similar political ecology of unequal power relations and the associated environmental degradation is discussed in a number of development sectors including, but not limited to, agriculture (Stonich, 1995), forestry (Hecht & Cockburn, 1989; Trejo & Dirzo, 2000), disease ecology (Pedersen, 1996), and tourism (Stonich, 2000). While developing nations are often blamed for this exploitation, an examination of the political ecology reveals that environmental problems in the Third World are not a result of policy failures in those countries, “but rather are a manifestation of broader political and economic forces associated notably with the spread of capitalism (Bryant, 1997, p. 8).

As noted earlier, tourism is strongly linked to the spread of capitalism (Mowforth et al., 2008), and a few scholars have therefore recognized the utility of the political ecology approach for examining tourism. Stonich looked at tourism development

through the lens of political ecology in the Bay Islands off the Caribbean coast of Honduras (1998). She found that locals have little influence over the nature of tourism development in their own communities, and that little improvements in quality of life resulted from participation in tourism except among previously wealthy elites (1998; 2000). Logan and Mosely (2002) likewise determined that existing political ecological power structures greatly diminished the ability of certain participants in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) to achieve the goals of poverty alleviation. Young (1999) demonstrated how pre-existing tensions over access to resources are perpetuated during whale-watching-based ecotourism in Baja, Mexico. Kent (2003) examines ecotourism in Bahía, Brazil, and found that conflicts over rights to resources related to ecotourism and environmental preservation usually favored power-advantaged external interests and came at the expense of locals' loss of access to resources.

While political ecology has often addressed "impoverishment of poor *agricultural* workers due to the extractions of elites and the commodification of 'Third World' peoples and environments at the behest of international capitalists" (Gwynne, 2004, p. 808, emphasis added), the approach is extraordinarily relevant to tourism research. Tourism and ecotourism in particular involve visits by relatively wealthy tourists to remote areas of the developing world, and often entail the imposition of commodified and wholly Western perspectives of nature and culture (West & Carrier, 2004). By its nature, tourism involves unequal power relations and, either for better or

worse, directly influences human-environment interactions. The political ecology lens is therefore an ideal one to bring to bear on the phenomenon of ecotourism.

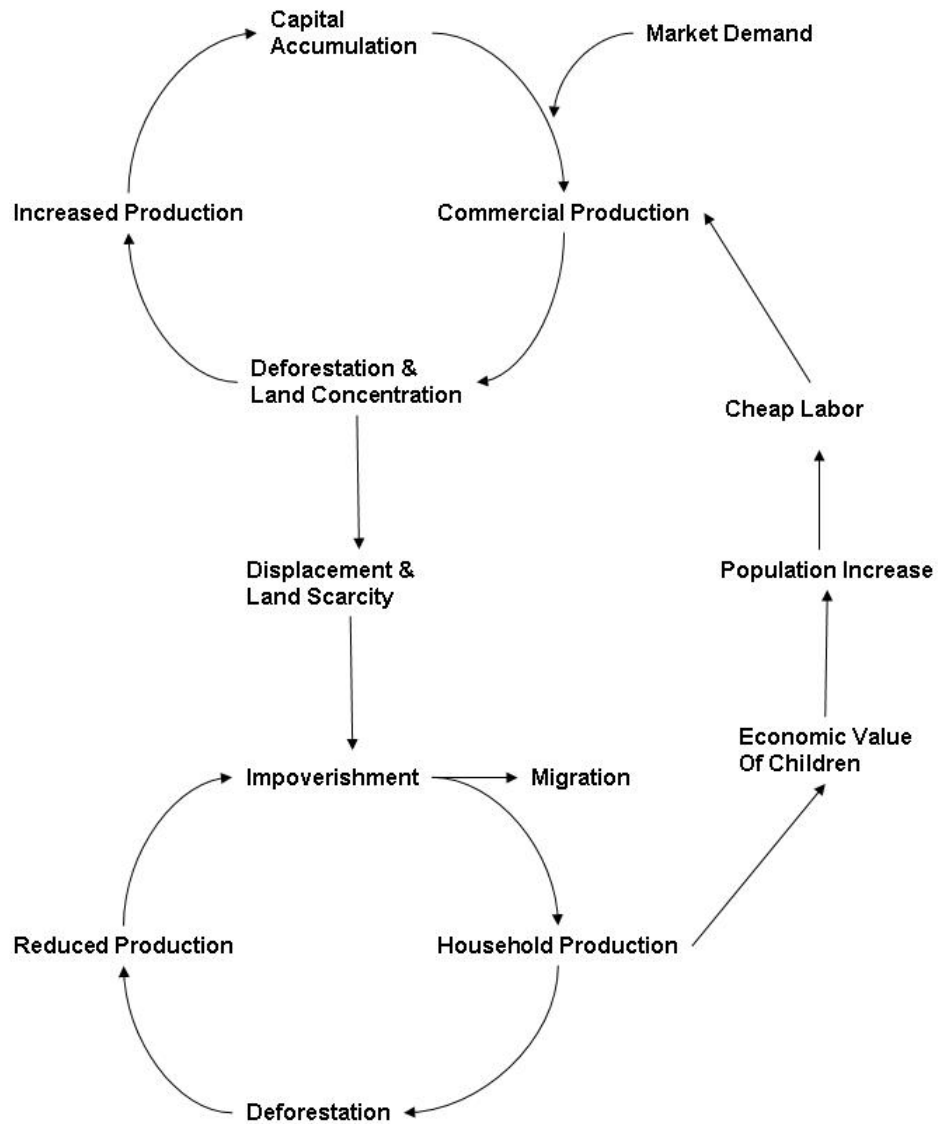
The Conceptual Framework for the Current Research

In *Social Causes of Environmental Destruction in Latin America*, editors Painter and Durham (1995) compile several descriptions of agriculturally-oriented development programs which aimed to increase foreign exchange earnings yet ultimately contributed to self-reinforcing cycles of impoverishment and deforestation. This book was developed at least partly in response to a lack of scholarly attention in ecological anthropology to issues of “ethnicity and the cultural evaluation of resources, of the internal social structure of human populations, or the more global structure of international relations” (Durham, 1995: 250). Challenging popular viewpoints which considered human environmental impact as a simple product of population, affluence, and technology (Ehrlich and Ehrlich, 1990), Durham (1995) concludes that the institutionalized nature of social relations within and between populations guarantees inequitable access to resources in Latin America. As a result of such inequalities, development initiatives were ultimately responsible for environmental destruction via two self-reinforcing feedback loops. This conceptual framework appears in Figure 8.

The first pathway is related to processes of capital accumulation. Driven by foreign and domestic market demand, the commercial production of ranching, logging, export crops, or any combination of these, expands into forest areas causing land degradation. Increased revenue from this expansion allows for reinvestment into the

means of production and the acquisition of new lands, further concentrating land ownership among wealthy elites. Inevitably greater economies of scale facilitate additional increases in production. Eventually the cycle is repeated as higher returns from increasing deforestation perpetuate forest loss. The accumulation of land in the hands of powerful interests, and the degradation caused from increasing production lead to land scarcity and forced displacement of local populations into increasingly marginal areas.

Through this concentration of land and displacement of the poor, a link is created from the first cycle of capital accumulation to a second pathway of impoverishment. Forced into less productive areas, the displaced poor must place greater demands on the household and their surroundings in an effort to maintain subsistence production. At this point the economic value of children, in the form of additional household labor, elevates. The attempts to expand, intensify, and diversify household activities ultimately place unsustainable demands on the already marginal soils. With no means to acquire new productive lands, the increasing household efforts lead to a vicious cycle of decreasing yields. When subsistence agriculture activities are eventually abandoned, a new pool of wage seekers emerges. Coupled with the population growth created from the increased labor value of children, an abundance of cheap labor develops. Many are forced to migrate and seek employment elsewhere, while those that remain must seek wage employment with those controlling the growing means of commercial production. The competition for the wage positions effectively subsidizes the labor expenses of wealthier



**Figure 8. Framework of the Social Causes of Environmental Destruction
in Latin America**

(source: Durham, 1995, in Painter and Durham, 1995)

producers, thereby feeding back directly into the previous cycle of commercial production.

Given the complexity of processes and issues involved, this conceptual model is very elegant. While Painter and Durham's book deals primarily with failed development agricultural campaigns in Latin America, most of which were designed to stimulate the production of non-traditional crops, there are reasons to expect the same pattern to emerge with tourism. From a balance sheet standpoint, tourism is an export, and while it could be argued that it is a non-traditional export anywhere it exists, given the changes that have taken place in the tourism industry during Nicaragua's 30+ year absence, tourism is logically conceived as a newly introduced, non-traditional export for Nicaragua. This is confirmed by interviewed Nicaraguan residents, none of whom have a memory of tourism more than ten years earlier. Additional ethnographic information and secondary data support the contention that this conceptual framework accurately describes the political ecology of tourism development in this region of Nicaragua. The paper now moves to a description of this methodology utilized during the ethnographic field research. Later, the data is applied to the conceptual framework, relating it to the development currently taking place along the country's southwestern coast, the nature of power relations there, and the influence of these processes and relations on the rural poor and the local environmental conditions.

Methods

This paper is based on field research carried out between January and June of 2008. As part of a comparative study of community participation in ecotourism in four countries, the author traveled to the Municipality of San Juan del Sur, Department of Rivas, Nicaragua in order to examine in ethnographic detail an ecotourism project known as Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. One month was spent getting oriented to the field site, gathering preliminary information, and identifying consensus threats to biodiversity in the area. The following two months were spent living on-site with the employees of the Hacienda and Ecolodge, gathering semi-structured interview and participant observation data. The two months following this time at Morgan's Rock were spent locating ex-employees; visiting and observing other tourism operations in the area; interacting with tourists, foreign residents, investors and vacation home owners; and conducting semi-formal interviews with the rural residents living adjacent to this operation.

Study Region

Nicaragua has been in a state of near constant crisis for nearly four decades. The 1972 earthquake originated directly below the colonial center of the capital city of Managua, totally leveling it and resulting in a loss of life around 20,000 persons. The downtown has yet to be rebuilt, partially due to the fact that much of the aid money that flowed into Nicaragua following the earthquake was effectively pilfered by then dictator Anastasio Debayle Somoza. These and other abuses of power contributed to the popular

uprising in 1978-79 leading to the overthrow of this dictator. Helping to incite and lead this uprising, the left-leaning *Frente Sandanista de Liberación Nacional* assumed governmental control during the 1980s.

Despite rapid gains in literacy rates and health standards in the early years of the revolutionary government, the Sandinistas were heavily challenged for their socialist tendencies. Fearing a second communist foothold on the American continent, the United States recruited, trained and equipped former Somoza National Guardsmen in order to mount a counter-revolutionary terror campaign from both the Honduran and Costa Rican borders. Designed to diminish popular support for the Sandinistas, this counter-revolution was effectively a bloody civil war in which 70,000 people perished in a country whose population at the time was a mere 3 million. Eventually the contras achieved their goal and the Sandinistas and president Daniel Ortega finally lost power to the more liberal Doña Violeta Chamorro in a popular election in 1990.

During the 1990s, the country remained ravaged and struggled to recover from the decade long civil war. Living standards had been reduced to pre-1950 conditions. This abject poverty continued to leave the population highly vulnerable to natural disasters (Pielke, et al., 2003), and unfortunately, less than a decade after the end of hostilities, this was perfectly demonstrated by Hurricane Mitch. This massive Category 5 hurricane made a direct hit on Nicaragua in 1998, blowing out hydroelectric dams, burying entire villages in mudslides, washing out roads, and ultimately killing 11,000 people in Nicaragua and leaving nearly a million homeless (EM-DAT, 2009). Again international aid flowed in and again it was pilfered by another unscrupulous head of

state Arnaldo Alemán. Frustrated by a lack of effective progress for the masses during the three terms of liberal rule, Nicaraguans recently re-elected Sandinista Daniel Ortega to the presidency in 2007.

Due to this armed conflict, political turmoil, and devastating natural disasters, Nicaragua remained virtually devoid of tourism infrastructure well into the late 1990's. Yet in the last decade those problems have been largely overcome. Being the largest and least-densely populated country in Central America (a region already book-ended by two of the world most recognized ecotourism destination - Costa Rica and Belize), Nicaragua is blessed with the world's 10th largest freshwater lake, a string of landscape-dominating volcanoes, white sand beaches, and mountainous forests. The large tracts of rainforest shared along the southeastern border with Costa Rica form the largest lowland rainforests outside of the Amazon (Barany, et al., 2001). The country's natural resource base positioned it well to take advantage of the ongoing ecotourism boom. Standing as the poorest country in the Western hemisphere behind Haiti and having one of the highest foreign debt ratios, Nicaragua desperately needs tourism as a foreign exchange earner.

For this reason tourism was heavily promoted and has grown rapidly in Nicaragua. Tourism growth has been particularly notable in the southwestern portion of the country. After the colonial town of Granada in the neighboring department of the same name, the island of Ometepe, the white sand beaches of Tola and picturesque seaside community San Juan del Sur in the department of Rivas are the country's primary tourism hotspots (2007). Rivas is composed primarily of a narrow isthmus

flanked on the eastern side by the massive Lake Nicaragua - the world's tenth largest - and the Pacific Ocean on the west. Only 20 km wide at the narrowest point, the Isthmus of Rivas was once the most logical choice for the construction of the inter-oceanic canal. Due to political turmoil and historically tense relations between the U.S. and Nicaragua, the canal eventually went to Panama. Regret over that loss continues to be expressed today. Nevertheless Rivas was destined to serve as a major commerce conduit. The strip of land is traversed by the Pan-American Highway which connects Nicaragua's central and northern population centers with the Costa Rican border at Peñas Blancas.

Since all southbound commerce must cross this narrow isthmus, the implications of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) for biodiversity conservation are enormous for this department. Rivas was originally dominated by dry tropical forest ecosystem, an ecosystem believed to have once covered more area in the tropics than rainforests and currently thought to be even more endangered (Janzen, 1988; Trejo & Dirzo, 2000). Yet dry tropical forests received very little conservation attention as Sanchez-Azofeifa and others (2005) note. However, these forests are far more easily converted to agricultural and grazing land (Trejo & Dirzo, 2000). Cattle ranching, sugar cane, and other agriculture have left little in the way of extensive dry tropical forest in southwestern Nicaragua, and CAFTA fuels fears that these processes will intensify.

The following statistics from the National Institute of Development Information (INIDE) estimate the 2005 population of Nicaragua at 5.1 million, with 1.3 million of those people in the capital city of Managua alone (INIDE, 2007). Its population density of 68.7% is the lowest in Central America. The department of Rivas has an estimated

population of 164,770. It is primarily rural in nature (52.6%) and composed of 10 municipal units. A total of 43,770 people reside in the departmental capital and main commerce hub, also named Rivas. The twin municipalities of Altagracia and Moyogalpa, together comprising the island of Ometepe, account for 31,571 residents. The fifth-most populous municipality is named after the once a sleepy fishing village of San Juan del Sur. The town proper is a Pacific port located on a picturesque horse-shoe shaped bay, and along with the surrounding countryside is now home to 15,191 inhabitants, not including a highly visible foreign resident population. It is this seaside community that serves as the nexus for massive tourism development currently throughout the region. The present research was takes place in the municipal region in and around San Juan del Sur, in the Department of Rivas.

Study Site

Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Eco-lodge is located 40 km from San Juan del Sur, and within two hours of both Managua and the Costa Rican border in automobile. Opened in 2004 on the property of an existing agro-forestry operation, Morgan's Rock is comprised of 15 luxury cabins located on forested bluffs overlooking a secluded white sand beach. This eco-lodge is part of an 800 hectare private nature reserve and 1,000 hectare tree farming and reforestation program initiated by a wealthy family of French origin, residents of Nicaragua for several decades and owners of one of the country's largest coffee plantations. The operation was modeled after the highly acclaimed Lapa Ríos eco-lodge located on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, and claims to be "a project

of nature conservation, community development and reforestation offering Agro- and Ecotourism at its best” (www.morgansrock.com). It has received much praise in popular media outlets including the New York Times, Condé Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, American Way, The Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, CNN, and also recently served as the location of a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition photo-shoot. By all indications the popular media and the touring public have accepted Morgan’s Rock’s claims. This popularity and the descriptions from the project website and in popular media served as the basis for selecting Morgan’s Rock as a publicly-recognized exemplar of ecotourism to serve as the basis for the present research. Contact with Morgan’s Rock was initiated in September 2007 at which time the research proposal was shared and permission granted to carry out the research.

Research Design

The ethnographic research utilized semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Interviews involved questions related to household composition, income and expenses, participation in and perception of tourism, conservation and resource management institutions, collective action, control and involvement in decision making, and perceived quality of life. Interviewees were selected via purposive sample in order to gather a range of perspectives from those most involved with the ecotourism project of interest: direct ecolodge/hotel employees, indirect hacienda and tree plantation (finca) employees, and adjacent neighbors of Morgan’s Rock passively involved in ecotourism (some with and some without a history at Morgan’s Rock tree plantation).

Prior to conducting these interviews, I performed free lists and pile sorts inspired by the Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA) technique described by Salafsky and Margoluis (1996) in order to identify conservation priorities in the region. These conservation targets were used to elaborate an interview guide for local conditions. In addition to these activities, I gathered information from many secondary sources, held countless informal discussions with local and foreign residents, visited numerous other tourism-related development both around Morgan's Rock and San Juan del Sur region, and recorded daily participant observation fieldnotes. Prior fieldwork in another region of Nicaragua in 2005 involving meetings with national tourism and resource management agencies was also crucial for advancing understanding of the processes of tourism development. All fieldnotes were recorded in SIL Fieldworks 2.0.

Participants

During initial phases of the fieldwork, individuals active in conservation endeavors were snowball sampled and administered the TRA-inspired free-listing and pile sorts exercises in order to compile a list of the primary threats to conservation in the area. Three individuals were identified, revealing the paucity of conservation efforts in the area. Participants included a former WWF researcher and dive shop owner, a U.S. retiree self-financing an iguana rehabilitation project, and an Interpol-supported veterinarian who administers an animal rehabilitation and re-introduction program. These assessments were then compiled with three additional assessments later conducted at Morgan's Rock. There employees having the most primary contact with biodiversity -

the hacienda administrator and the two naturalist guides - were purposively sampled and administered the TRA.

A convenience sample of 20 hacienda employees and 20 hotel employees were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. A final 20 interviews were solicited from the households immediately neighboring Morgan's Rock. These typically lasted from 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours. Interviews were normally conducted outside of the employees' work hours, and interviewees were paid U\$10 for their participation. Hacienda employees included tree planters/pruners, irrigationists, livestock hands, a mechanic, two boat captains, a garbage man, and assistant administrator. Hotel employees included members of the cleaning staff, kitchen staff, wait staff, drivers, and maintenance workers. Several neighboring residents were unemployed, while others worked in construction or as security guards for tourism operations.

While these interviews are an important source of primary data and efforts were made to follow the pre-determined interview guide, ongoing qualitative insights gathered during earlier phases of the fieldwork aided in the acknowledgement of the different ways that participants interpreted and responded to the questions in the interview guide. These insights considerably enhanced understanding of local reactions and attitudes far beyond that available via a more formal surveying or even a *prima facie* evaluation of participants' responses. Interviews therefore proceeded with more concern for eliciting locally-derived perspectives than on strict adherence to the interview guide. Subsequent analysis utilized this awareness in order to contextualize response within the daily realities of rural Nicaragua life.

Primary Threats to Biodiversity Conservation

The results of the TRA with Morgan's Rock staff and local conservationists were used to determine the three primary threats to biodiversity for inclusion in the interview guide. In the six assessments conducted, 12 threats were identified (Table 8). Of these twelve, only five were named three or more times: pet trade, subsistence hunting, tourism development, logging/deforestation, and burning. It was determined in advance that the interview guide would include questions related to just the three primary biodiversity threats. In the reviewing the assessments, it was clear that hunting for

Table 8. Identification of Threats to Biodiversity

	TRA 1	TRA 2	TRA 3	TRA 4	TRA 5	TRA 6	TOTALS
Pet trade	X	X		X			3
Subsistence Hunting		X		X	X	X	4
Commercial Fishing	X		X				2
Trash	X		X				2
Chemical Dumping/Oil Spills	X						1
Tourism Development		X	X	X			3
Corruption		X					1
Human Waste			X				1
Water			X				1
Logging/Deforestation			X	X		X	3
Lack of Enforcement			X				1
Burning				X	X	X	3

subsistence and pet trade both represent threats related to wildlife; therefore, these two items were collapsed into a single priority related to wildlife. Likewise, qualitative information revealed that the negativity associated with burning related to accidental loss of forest. The threats of burning and logging/deforestation were also collapsed into a single item related to trees. This left tourism development itself as the third-most cited threat to biodiversity and was the last to be included in the interview guide. Prior to conducting the evaluation, the identification of more specific threats was anticipated. Yet the final choices were vague enough to allow participants to describe the three threats in ways that made sense to them rather than in a narrow fashion dictated by the specificity of the items. This often revealed additional motivations and explanations, facilitating a broader understanding of local perspectives on deforestation, wildlife loss, and tourism development.

The results gathered from these exercise immediately drew attention to the powerful impact tourism was having in the San Juan del Sur region. Tourism development was specifically identified as a major threat to biodiversity, and closer examination of the additional responses reveals many factors directly related to rapid increase in tourism development over the last several years: trash, chemical dumping (from constructions), and human waste. In addition, tourism development is also highly linked to deforestation, both with the respect to the clearing of land for construction and for the demand for building materials. This in turn is directly impacts wildlife. Prior to even beginning with the collection of formal data via the semi-structured interviews, tourism began to emerge as the most prominent force for land degradation.

Pathways of Capital Accumulation via Tourism Development

In this section I will use the ethnographic information to describe how the processes of tourism development in, around, and including Morgan's Rock are contributing to the first cycle of the conceptual framework, that of capital accumulation. While I use aggregate, secondary data as the basis for describing these regional processes, ethnographic information based on participant observational data, site-visits to various tourism developments in the region, discussions with foreign residents, developers, and tourists, and also previous work experience related to tourism in other regions of the country provide unanimous support for the application of the conceptual framework to tourism development in southwestern Nicaragua. I now address each individual component of the framework (see Figure 8).

Market Demand for Tourism

Tourism has recently outpaced petroleum as the world's largest industry (WTO, 2006). The cultural richness of the Latin American region typified by the remnants of Aztec, Mayan, Incan and other indigenous civilizations, as well as from the colonial period which followed, has made Latin America a popular destination for cultural tourism for decades. Spectacular ruins including Machu Picchu, Chichen Itza, and Tikal have served as the focal points for these forms of tourism. Yet the popularity of Latin America as a tourism destination was greatly enhanced with the rising popularity of ecotourism, the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry (Weinburg et al., 1998). As noted previously, Latin America is where ecotourism got an early start and where

activities are arguably largest in scale and diversity (Stronza, 2008). Nicaragua is actively promoting tourism visits and investment, including a package of tax and other investment incentives specifically related to tourism development known as Law 306 (INTUR, 2007). The virgin, white sand beaches of the Pacific Coast have proven a powerful lure.

Commercial Production

In the 1980s, tourism was virtually non-existent in Nicaragua due to the ongoing civil war between the Sandinistas and the Contras – “There was a blockade against investors and they all went away. During the war, the president threw them out and closed the door.” With the end of the conflict and the Sandinista loss in the 1990 election, the tourism outlook changed dramatically in the 1990s – “Since Doña Violeta, Arnoldo Alemán, and Bolaños it grew a lot.” “When the changes of Doña Violeta came along, many gringos started coming into Nicaragua to make their buildings, to travel around.” Between 1997 and 2007 the commercial production of tourism began in earnest, with tourist arrivals to Nicaragua more than doubling from 358,439 to 799,996, and revenues from those arrivals more than tripling from \$74.4 million to \$255.1 million (INTUR, 2007) – “Yes, it has changed a lot. I remember before that very few people knew anything about tourism. Very little tourism existed in the whole country. We have seen a great change of like 70% in the tourism.” Others suggest an even greater quantity, “It has risen up some 80%. It was very low. Tourists only went to Costa Rica.” Cruise ships began porting in San Juan del Sur during this time – “Before those

big cruise ships never came in here. Now they've been coming for the last five years. The dock is new, some Japanese came to build it."

Tourism has skyrocketed to the top of the export list, beating out other principal exports including beef, coffee, shellfish, and sugar for each of the last years (2007) – "(before) we only thought about cotton, sesame, and rice." "It used to be all agriculture. Now there are jobs because people are coming to visit." Statistics for the individual departments are rare and for the municipalities they are lacking altogether. One indication of the concentration of tourism development happening in the vicinity of Morgan's Rock is the number of lodging establishment and rooms available in the department of Rivas is second only to the capital city of Managua (INTUR, 2007), despite Rivas being the least populated Pacific Coast department, as noted by a worker "it has changed a lot, mostly here in this region of the country, the south."

Deforestation & Land Concentration

The construction of resort, vacation home, and residential tourism complexes in San Juan del Sur is large-scale and rapid. The realty map in Figure 9 indicates 70+ developments along approximately 40 km miles of coastline to the north and south of San Juan del Sur. These constructions can be quite elaborate, involving dozens or even hundreds of individual home or condo plots. The vast majority of these projects are very land intensive, starting with clearing of the land and the loss of any remaining dry tropical forest, "they use it for the construction, the same construction of the big hotels

Figure 9. Tourism Development on the San Juan del Sur Coastline
(source: Water's Edge Realty, reproduced with permission)

- Property Sales
- Vacation Rentals
- Property Management

WATER'S EDGE

INTERNATIONAL REALTY

Next to Hotel Estrella
San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua
Nicaragua: 568 2180
From USA/Canada +1 786 206 4361

WATER'S EDGE

INTERNATIONAL REALTY

N I C A R A G U A

Unit Measures

1 meter = 3.28 feet
1 meter² = 10.76 feet²
1 foot = 0.304 meter
1 foot² = 0.093 meter²
1 acre = 4,049 meters²
1 vara² = 0.70 meter²
1 vara² = 7.595 feet²
1 manzana = 1.73 acres
1 manzana = 10,000 varas²
1 hectare = 2.47 acres
1 kilometer = 0.62 mile
1 mile = 1.6 kilometers
1 gallon = 3.785 litres

BEACHES

(marked in blue)

01. Ocotal
02. La Florita
03. Miagual
04. Maderas
05. Los Playones
06. Mansella
07. El Toro
08. Bahía Nacascolo
09. Bahía San Juan del Sur
10. Remanso
11. Tamarindo
12. Hermosa
13. Las Tablas
14. Escamequita
15. Yankee
16. Escameca
17. Coco
18. La Redonda
19. Brasillio
20. La Flor
21. La Cagada de Holmann
22. Bahía Guacaillo
23. Oñidal
24. Manzaniillo

DEVELOPMENTS

37. Bahía del Mar
38. Bahía del Sol
39. Balcón de Miagual
40. Bay View Terrace
41. Bosques del Mar
42. Brasillio
43. Brisas de Palermo
44. Costa Azul
45. Casa Marina
46. Coco's Beach
47. Congo Hills
48. Costa Dulce
49. Costa Paraiso
50. El Bosque
51. El Carisal
52. El Club del Mar
53. El Encanto
54. El Torreon
55. Ficus Las Nubes
56. Horizonte Azul
57. La Talanguera
58. Ladara
59. Las Fincas de Escamequita
60. Little Bavaria

SYMBOLS

Los
Houses
Condos/Town Homes

International Team - Local Expertise

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and all that – they use lots of wood.” It has to do with the development of tourism, the construction.” In reference to the process of getting permits to cut wood, one employee provides this insight, “They start talking, they say it is for creating jobs, that a hotel will improve the place, and it stays at that. The law doesn’t apply.” This includes golf resorts, such as a Jack Nicklaus designed course under developed in the north of Rivas. “Wherever there is construction, there are no trees. Over there used to be a forest and now it is all (vacation) houses.”

The constructions later contribute to contamination of the fresh water and marine resource via chemical dumping, “An investor takes away 5 manzanas of forest to make a hotel, and they contaminate too. The construction materials include lots of chemicals, and the vehicles come, the rivers,...the forests dry up, the rivers dry up. That happens.” While Nicaraguan law states that beaches are the public property of all citizens, the majority of all access routes are now in the hands of developers, “we cannot go to the beaches anymore, to look for food or anything. The entrance is guarded, the guards are armed...the tourism has changed, and the people have changed. Mostly here in the south. It has changed a lot here.” On several beaches, including Playa Ocotal in front of Morgan’s Rock, beaches are patrolled and any “trespassers” are quickly “convinced” to leave, “I tried to go collect some crustaceans on the next beach and they shot at me! I had to climb into the woods to hide from them.” Clearly showing how this deforestation is directly related to tourism development and thus land scarcity, one local residents describes “yes, there is deforestation. The kids don’t have the same happy environment to grow up in like before. Before there were no fences. Now there are

fences everywhere. The gringos have everything enclosed. Now the happiness if only for the tourists, the rich, the foreigners. Nothing is left for us. It is sad.”

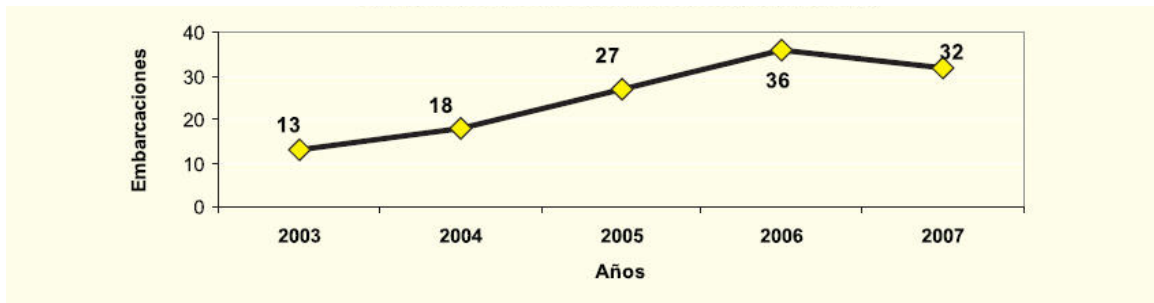


Figure 10. Cruise Ship Arrivals San Juan del Sur 2003-2007

Increased Production

Nicaragua is one of the few countries in the world that experienced positive tourism growth in an economically turbulent 2008 (WTTC, 2008), “it keeps developing little by little....there are now many huge hotels in Nicaragua..a lot of income..cruise ships also come now.” As seen in Figure 10, cruise ship visits continue to increase. In 2007, 23,102 tourists arrived on 37 cruise ships (INTUR, 2007), more than the population of San Juan del Sur. Preliminary statistics indicate that 31 cruise ships arrived in just the first three alone months of 2008 (INTUR, 2008). Early small scale tourism efforts, such as those that catered to the backpacker and surf crowd, are subsidizing these later, larger efforts by providing a skilled labor pool – “There are

investors. They are like cigarettes – one isn't bad, but a lot of them can harm your health! They keep taking away access.”

These larger, commercial producers can also leverage for infrastructure. New infrastructure being developed in San Juan del Sur includes sidewalks up and down main streets and a boardwalk-style welcoming area complete with street lamps, clearing in the interests of mass tourism and cruise ship arrivals. Meanwhile, large portion of the population living in the close vicinity of San Juan del Sur, such as those interviewed outside of Morgan's Rock, lack basic necessities such as potable water and electricity, as one lodge worker notes, “Improve access, the roads – the government doesn't worry itself with that – the basic services – everyone had these problems.” When Morgan's Rock was constructed, it was necessary to run electrical lines to the property. Rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to assist neighboring households by running these lines the road, “they put the electric lines in on the other side, where it is private.”

Again and again respondents point to the quantity of hotels and vacation homes that has gone up around San Juan del Sur, highlighting the lack of planning. “Here is San Juan where they have been doing so much construction there are areas of potential catastrophe, like a landslide that would carry away all the houses that have been built on the slopes. All the deforestation that they have done in order to built too.” “Well, there is too much construction, too much noise, the deforestation. The animals have to look for other places to live, or else they die. All these things. With time tourism will have to do with this....big hotels are too lavish.” “Whatever there was before, there is now 100% more! Here is San Juan del Sur there was very little tourism. There was nothing

of construction projects. Now there are many projects each year.” “They don’t take into account the trees. They should maintain the place with trees. Now everything is bald. There is a lot of construction. They are screwing up the environment.”

Capital Accumulation

Today in Nicaragua, the richest 10% of the population control 48.8% of Nicaragua’s wealth, while the poorest 10% account for only 0.7%, representing one of the most extreme disparities in the world (World Bank, 2002). One resident expresses this, “with tourism money enters the country, but for us nothing arrives. For us nothing is left. We haven’t gotten a thing from tourism. Only the mayor, the big people. Once in a while there is work.” In Nicaragua, 45.1% of the population lives on less than \$1 per day, while a staggering 79.9% live on less than \$2 per day (UNDP, 2005). Even ecotourism employees struggle to make ends meet, “The salaries are low. They are too low. With a salary of C\$3500 (approx. U\$185/month), and a little tips, that is only enough to eat good once in awhile. We have to eat poorly other times. The salary doesn’t come out complete. Here in Nicaragua the situation is very hard.”

The government has had to aggressively court external investors in order to earn foreign exchange. Therefore the investment in tourism is almost exclusively foreign-driven, with a few extremely wealthy Nicaragua elites funding certain projects. Another resident comments, “they are gringos. They have money. If someone says they are deforesting no one will listen to us folks that have no money. They are going to listen to they that have the money.” This only exacerbates the extreme wealth divide in this

country. Meanwhile opportunities for local residents in tourism are largely restricted to either the initial construction efforts, or later worked in security and vigilance, as a neighbor notes “the owners are all foreigners. That is what there is most of around here – tourism.” Many of the large developments that appear in Figure 2 only await further investment for embarking on further constructions (Pelican Eyes, 2008). Economies of scale favor this increased production, as noted by the Ponçon’s family interest in the development of additional lodges in Nicaragua. Thus, the cycle is completed and additional commercial production ensues.

Displacement and Land Scarcity

The commercial production of tourism and the related, self-reinforcing cycles of capital accumulation described above has a direct impact on the local poor via their displacement to increasingly marginal lands. This section describes how the actions of the wealthy, via this cycle, relate to the poor, and thus reinforce the cycle of impoverishment described further below.

Wealthy

Land speculation has become a highly visible enterprise in San Juan del Sur. This has resulted in the falling increasingly into the hands of the foreign investors and wealthy elite of Nicaragua. One local residents described the situation – “only the tourists are going to see the terrain, the nature. Nicaragua is no longer Nicaraguan – pure tourists. It is like a colony, with slaves. It is going to be only for the foreigner.”

Realty marketing encourage investors to “get in before its too late,” and U.S.-based realtors Caldwell Banker, Century 21, and REMAX, as well as numerous Nicaraguan counterparts, now have offices lining the streets of San Juan del Sur. “Many people go around with the gringos investigating where to buy land and make their earnings.” In relation to the international market for tropical, white-sand coastline, the prices in Nicaragua are considered highly under-valued. The land becomes highly parcelized for sale as individual home or condominium lots. One hotel employees put it this way, “they are buying all the properties. There are no virgin beaches anymore. Lobster and stuff like that is already gone. They are eating everything. This place is going to turn out like the U.S.!”

Poor

Along the coast of Nicaragua few of the property owners from just 20 years ago currently remain. The intense poverty in Nicaragua is used by developers to leverage the land sales at under-market values. This forces residents to move further inland and away from coastal and forest resources, as a resident explains “there are more buildings. Before it used to be populated with fisherman’s houses or tradesman. Now there are buildings up to the hills. The people have sold their homes only to end up far away where there are no jobs.” Most only realized what was happening after it was too late. “They didn’t know anything about it. If they had realized what it was all about, they wouldn’t have sold their land.” This displacement onto marginal, less productive lands, coupled with the loss of access to important resources greatly reduced the yield of

subsistence activities. A neighbor explains how it was “Everyone used to walk around here and no one said anything about it. Including myself, I would collect shellfish from Ocotal Beach (where Morgan’s Rock is currently located). For me I think the ocean should not be prohibited. I would like them to open those places up.” In addition, new regulation pertaining to tourism-related deforestation now require permits for the cutting of all trees in Nicaragua, even if on one’s own property and for personal use. The expenses related to the filing of paperwork and transportation to agency offices required to obtain these permits, though of little consequence to tourism developers, are inordinately high for the rural poor. A lodge employee explains “the only place the law is applied is to the most humble people – those that don’t have the resources to pay. They impose a fine on them. On the great exporters of wood there is no penalty. That is the great corruption here.” As a result, even simple home repairs utilizing wood from trees growing on private property requires residents to commit illegal, punishable acts. A plantation worker points out the irony in this, “a man was caught without permission (cutting wood on his own property) and they punished him, threw him in jail. They didn’t fine him because he didn’t have any money to pay the fine – that is why he was cutting the wood!” The same principle applies to subsistence hunting on private property, even worse as one resident recalls in an incident at Morgan’s Rock, “they even shot a hunter. They killed him.” These conditions feed directly into the cycle of impoverishment.

Pathways of Tourism-Related Impoverishment

Whereas the previous section deals primarily with the increase in production and wealth attributable to tourism developers and related interests in the San Juan del Sur area near Morgan's Rock, the information presented in this section describes impacts on poor in Nicaragua, 80% of whom live on less than U\$2/day as noted above. Based on the opportunities being offered them, these individuals demonstrated little distinction between ecotourism at Morgan's Rock and other tourism developments occurring in the vicinity. The interests of the rural poor have been largely overlooked by foreign and elite Nicaraguan investors. Many had strong opinions about the changes taking place, and appreciated having an opportunity to voice them. Here I again integrate their perspectives with secondary development data to portray the vicious cycle of impoverishment caused by rapid tourism development in this area.

Impoverishment

Per person income levels, which reached a peak of U\$814 in 1977, plummeted during the Sandinista revolution and U.S. sponsored counter-revolution of the 1980s, falling as low as \$453 by the end of the decade (Gapminder, 2009). One older ecotourism employee remembers that time "after the war there was total poverty. There was nothing to eat, to take home to the family. Hunger was the only thing that mattered at that time." Only in the last three years has per person income exceeded the 1977 peak, reaching an all-time high of U\$989 in 2007; however, when purchasing power

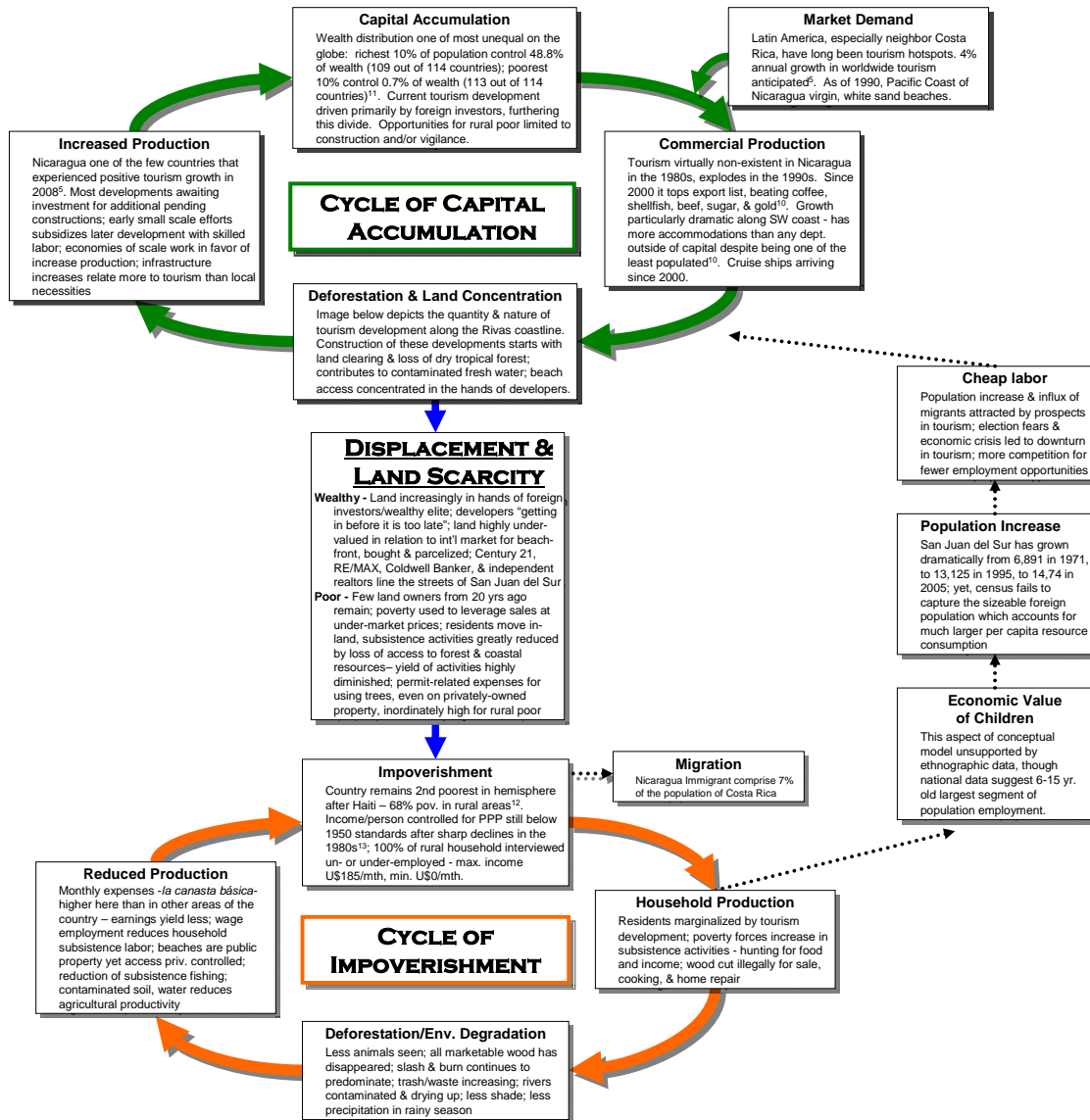


Figure 11. Conceptual Framework Elaborated to Nicaraguan Conditions

parities are accounted for, the 2007 Gross National Income Per Person of U\$1707 represents a mere half of the purchasing power of the 1977 peak at U\$3349 and little improvement over the 1950 levels of U\$1616 (Gapminder, 2008). One local resident had this to say about the situation, “nowadays all the things have gone up in price – a bag of cement costs way too much. The gringos have bought up everything and that is jeopardizing us. People no longer talk in córdobas here, they talk in dollars.” Among the impoverished rural resident interviewed during this study, 95% of households had unemployed family members, and several households had no currently employed family member, including a single mothers of three children. An employee of the tree plantation relates this to impacts on biodiversity, “there are people here that don’t have a job. They hunt to eat, or to sell the meat.” Even for those that work, the situation is increasingly difficult, as a plantation worker notes, “The costs of living leave zero right now, and with this government, it is just getting worse.” One impoverished woman puts it even more succinctly, “we are even poorer. But there is more work.”

Household Production

The displacement caused by tourism development puts pressure on poor households to expansion, intensification, and diversification of activities in order to subsist. One man recalls the loss of his families land to the wealthy family that owns Morgan’s Rock, “before that farm used to be my father’s. I worked there, from 1978-1988. The family lived there during the Agrarian Reform. It was 720 manzanas. They ended up paying my uncle, but he did not have the title – the land was not his to sell.

When we would not vacate the property, 200 men showed up with AK-47s, shotguns, machetes, and made us leave.” With the land scarcity or displacement to less productive areas, residents are left little option but to seek wage labor outside of the household, as a ecotourism employees describes, “the biggest threat is the poor people have to leave the place. The tourists buy, and keep buying, and afterward the only thing there is tourism. In San Juan del Sur they want to do away with fishing.” Other unemployed households survive on family contributions, credit with local stores, or other subsistence activities. This weighs heavily on local residents, as this woman describes, “we take things out of the store – they give us an account but since we are not working, we don’t have any money to pay with. We are depressed. It’s already been several months without work. The account is only for 15 days.” While all but a couple honest interviewees were reluctant to report their involvement in hunting of any kind, few people blame subsistence hunters – “Look, the people here in Nicaragua lack many things. When they see an animal walk by and they are hungry, they take them.” Plantation workers report intrusions at Morgan’s Rock on a near nightly basis, “around here the people just don’t understand. It is known as being protected for the last 10 years, but they just don’t pay any attention to the protection. They come in during the night and then leave by the morning. Residents are also tempted to illegally cut wood, either for home repair, for firewood, or for sale “because of the economic situation, the poverty, they need to cut the wood.”

Deforestation

Both local residents and Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge employees report the disappearance of all marketable tropical hardwoods outside of private reserves or formal tree plantations such as Morgan's Rock. "After the Sandinista government, all of this began to disappear with the indiscriminate deforestation they did. Everything disappeared." Residents are clear on the destination of this wood, "the people deforest in order to sell wood to the gringos." As a result, "the animals have to go some other place. Nowadays hardly anyone knows the animals. The iguanas, armadillos, deer, turkey, and other comestible species seen in abundance at Morgan's Rock are under extreme pressure elsewhere and seen very rarely outside its borders. One resident recognizes this, "there they have all kinds of animals. They look for refuge there, all the animals from this zone," yet also states "taking care of animals is one thing, but mistreating people is another" in reference to being deprived of hunting resources. On one occasion when an iguana was spotted at the side of the road, a public bus screeched to a halt, throwing dozens of passengers out of their seats, while five men dashed out the door and into the trees only to emerge a few minutes later with an iguana in a burlap bag.

Slash and burn continues to be the most common agricultural practice, and while this does not always involve the clearing of additional forest, the fires often sent sparks and coals onto adjacent lands, which, during the intense dry season, can spread quickly with disastrous loss of forest – "fire – it kills the little trees and the big trees. Wherever it lands it burns. There are many accidents because of carelessness, yet when it comes time to plant they aren't so careless!" The plantation administrator confirms fires have

“jumped” onto Morgan’s Rock property from neighboring properties. Residents and employees also report a shift in local climates, represented by longings for times past when the air was fresher, creeks cleaner, and the shade cooler as a hotel employee notes, “they are destroying the trees, the ones that give the most shade and store up water....the ideas is keep the place fresh, cool. For that reason I am opposed to this.” The lack of trees is contributes to other negative affects. A resident explained, “there are many forests that have been cut down. The rivers and wells dry up. There is no shade.” If the hydrological disruption continues, some are concerned that “if there are no trees there is no rainy season.”

Decreased Production

While nearly all rural residents cultivate basic foods such as rice, beans, and corn, and have fruit bearing trees such as mangos, oranges, and papaya on their property, the areas under cultivation were on average extremely small, only a half a manzanas among residents. Employees of Morgan’s Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge, most of whom earn very modest salaries themselves yet hail from other areas of the country, report much larger landholdings under cultivation, averaging 4 and 5.2 manzanas respectively under cultivation. As has been noted in the several of the quotes above, poor in San Juan del Sur have sold bits and pieces of their land, or their entire plots, and moved onto the remaining corners of the original properties, or onto that of other family members. Other important subsistence activities are affected. While fishing remains legal, hunting in Nicaragua is illegal without the proper documentation, even on private property. One

resident complains, “before I could grab an animal from my own land. Now I can’t sell it or even go to some other place to hunt.” The agencies responsible for this and the associated legal requirements are known to all, but the prohibitively expensive costs involved prevent the rural poor from acquiring this legal permission. It is therefore just as illegal to hunt animals on the scarcely populated residual farmlands as it is inside the regenerating forests and private reserve of Morgan’s Rock.

In addition to affecting subsistence activities, the land scarcity has greatly reduced the not only the capacity of local residents to maintain themselves with small businesses. A lodge employee explains, “a big investment could close the doors on people’s existing businesses, including the maintenance of the family through subsistence cultivation. But it depends on the tourism, the amplitude of the business, of the restaurant or hotel, and whether they are cutting down trees to make a garden or not. Most foreigners come and the local businesses lose their traditional clients, and they also cannot grow as a business.” Efforts to seek wage labor elsewhere leads to further abandonment of subsistence cultivation; yet, those that have shifted to wage labor no longer have own cultivation to fall back on. Nationally, the cost of the *canasta basica*, a calculation of the costs of a collection of basic living expenses required to feed a family for a month, “is more expensive than ever” due to the worldwide food crisis. Even more alarming, as seen in the responses to the interviews in this study, is the fact that despite having higher earnings, employees from both Morgan’s Rock tree plantation and hotel both spend less on monthly food expenses than the local residents. Since the majority of employees come from other regions of the country, and they typically send their money

there to be spent by their families, this difference is explained by the presence of tourism. This region is the most touristic in the country, much more so than other parts of Nicaragua. Several employees commented on this, “the exact same thing, like a plate of food or some property, are much more expensive around here than in other parts.” Another comments on the double-edged sword of tourism in the area, “they come here to invest and that is fine. But the prices go up. They can pay but we can’t.” In this way the self-reinforcing cycle of impoverishment is completed.

Feedback Loops

While the mechanisms which self-reinforce the two cycles described above have already been described, Durham’s (1995) conceptual framework also includes a feedback loop from the impoverishment cycle that reinforces commercial production, of tourism in this case. To the extent permitted by the available data, these feedback mechanisms are elaborated in this section.

Migration

The difficult economic situation in Nicaragua has long motivated its citizens to seek employment opportunities in neighboring Costa Rica. According to a recent study, Nicaraguans currently comprise as much as 8% of the Costa Rican labor force (Gindling, 2008). Many interviewees stated they had a history of working in Costa Rica. Despite their employment at Morgan’s Rock, which requires them to live on the premises, a few employees there expressed their intentions to go back because “it is almost the same

thing as going to Costa Rica to work. You only see the family every three months.”

While the conceptual framework being applied here refers to out-migration for employment opportunities, the paucity of jobs in other areas of Nicaragua stimulates many to come to this corner of the country to seek opportunities in tourism, or as one plantation worker phrases it, “they come to sit down at the table that is already prepared.” These migrant workers are not recognized by local residents, and tourism operators in San Juan del Sur have cited them as a reason for increase in aggravated crime against tourists in recent years, including a vicious attack and kidnapping of an expatriot family in San Juan del Sur in February, 2008. By all means their presence only contributes to the processes leading to population increase and cheap labor discussed below.

Economic Value of Children

The primary data collected for this study did show that employees of Morgan’s Rock ecolodge, who primarily come from other departments, have more children on average than workers coming from other regions of the country. National-level data gathered by World Bank officials indicates that the 6-15 year-old age bracket, those born during the renaissance of tourism in Nicaragua, are indeed the largest segment of the population (Gutierrez, et al., 2008). Yet, qualitative information indicates that those employees paid the highest salaries, such as the administrator of Morgan’s Rock Ecolodge, the nature guides, the restaurant staff, and the finca assistant administrator and mechanic, all have no children. In contrast, those employed in lower-level positions all

have children. While this seems to support the conceptual model in that residents of this zone of high tourism development have more children, those at the ecolodge also have higher levels of education which correlates highly with less children.

This aspect of the conceptual model is thus rather weak. Since the framework was originally developed to describe agricultural development programs, it is clear how more children contribute economically, in the form of labor, to household production. However, in a service-oriented industry such as tourism, there may be few opportunities for children and therefore their contributions, in the form of labor or income, to the household may not offset the additional economic burden they would create. This may partially explain the weak support for this element of the conceptual framework, though in the context of tourism, additional research would be needed to determine the extent to which this contributes to population increase.

Population Increase

The population of San Juan del Sur has grown dramatically. In 1971, this was a bustling but small fishing village of 6,891 residents. Due to the tumultuous situation in the country, the next census was not conducted until 1995, by which time the town had grown to 13,125 residents. This was estimated at 16,694 in 2004 (INIDE, 2004). Yet this census data do not take into account the large foreign resident population or the transient vacation home owners that collectively account for not only a notable increase in the population but also much higher per capita resource consumption. The influx of construction workers may likewise be missed by census data or projections. In both

cases, capturing data on the foreigner and immigrant worker population was neither a goal nor a possibility of this particular fieldwork.

Cheap Labor

This population increase, fueled by the arrival those seeking opportunities in tourism and the apparent increase in the economic value of children, results in an over-saturated pool of labor. Morgan's Rock is a case in point. The majority of its employees come from other departments, occupying positions that leave neighboring residents with none. Despite the continued positive growth of tourism in Nicaragua in recent years, residents notice a reduction in tourism as a result of the re-election of Daniel Ortega in 2006, "last year there was more tourism than this year because of the political problems, maybe the tourists are scared to come because of this." The lack of activity leaves an already large labor pool even more swollen, driving wages down even further. One unemployed resident laments, "Employ some people from around here! They bring people in from outside. Work, give us some work!" The result is more competition among local resident for fewer jobs – a situation the large producers are all-to-ready to take advantage of, thereby completing this feedback loop from the cycle of impoverishment back to that of commercial production and capital accumulation of tourism.

Discussion

Many previous development paradigms in Latin America have focused on the cultivation and exportation of non-traditional agricultural products with high market value. Despite early gains for small producers, political ecology scholars have identified the processes through which larger producers eventually come to dominate the commercial production of these export products (Painter and Durham, 1995). Economies of scale eventually facilitate the creation of reinforcing cycles of capital accumulation among the large producers, and downward spirals of increasing marginalization and impoverishment among the smaller producers and rural poor. These cycles result in mechanisms of environmental destruction by creating a disparity of access to resources (Bebbington, 1999). This paper presents the voices of those living in an area of rapid tourism development to make the claim that in Nicaragua the commercial production of another non-traditional export – tourism – is reinforcing the same cycles of capital accumulation and impoverishment seen in the agricultural development programs studied elsewhere (Painter and Durham, 1995).

Tourism is often promoted as a development strategy (Hawkins and Maun, 2007). Devastated by war and natural disasters, Nicaragua desperately aggressively promotes tourism in order to increase foreign exchange. Tourism growth in Nicaragua has been particularly notable in the southwestern portion of the country. Although this region is serving as the mold for future tourism development in other parts of the country, to date development is happening in an ad hoc fashion, much as Campbell (1999) describes. Yet to date tourism has failed Nicaragua. Though revenues from

tourism have more than tripled in the past decade, these economic gains are “a necessary but not sufficient condition for reducing poverty” (Loker, 1996; 70). Improvements to date are more likely a reflection of the low baselines provided by the staggering poverty than of to any specific efforts to address issues of poverty, inequality, or environmental degradation. Improvements in infrastructure are often simply aesthetic and primarily serve the interests of tourism (e.g. sidewalks and street lamps). Meanwhile, the majority of households just a few kilometers from town have no electricity, running water, or sanitation services. Given tourism’s current place at the top of the export list, and Nicaragua’s continued growth of tourism in 2008 despite the worldwide economic downturn, there is little reason to expect these processes to change any time soon.

Ecotourism is one alternative development strategy which can overcome the vicious cycles responsible for land degradation and the persistence of poverty (Durham, 2008); however, others have shown that ecotourism shares an extricable link to larger processes of conventional tourism (Kontogeorgopolous, 2004; Weaver, 2001). This is certainly the case in this research which was initiated as an ethnographic study of a single ecotourism project. It was discovered that few if any locals make any qualitative distinction between the ecotourism project at Morgan’s Rock and other resort or residential tourism developments in the area. Although the intention here is not to evaluate the extent to which Morgan’s Rock is effectively achieving positive ecotourism outcomes, it seems clear that even if ecotourism is responsibly managed, when it occurs in the midst of an area being so heavily developed with conventional tourism it is much more likely to contribute to the poverty, socio-economic disparities, and environmental

impacts of these other forms of mainstream tourism than it is to reverse them. This supports the opinion of Jafari (2001) that alternative forms of tourism including ecotourism, though well-intentioned, are only a small portion of the tourist product. As Schevyns (2007) points out, it will be difficult to get the industry or even well-intentioned governments to prioritize the interest of the poor over those of powerful elites. If tourism growth continues at the current rate and in the currently style over the coming years, the extreme and embedded nature of the disparities of wealth in Nicaragua are likely to persist.

Future Directions

This has revealed many opportunities additional research on the processes. Zambrano and others (2007) conducted a multi-scale study of the impact of ecotourism using satellite imagery to corroborate ethnographic data gathered from local residents. The use of satellite imagery could provide further support for the conceptual framework presented here, but quantifying the amount of land being converted into tourism developments, as compared to previous conditions. The locations of tourism developments could then be compared to other trends outside of the tourism developments as well as in other parts of Nicaragua in order to isolate the specific impacts attributable to tourism development.

As noted earlier, data is entirely lacking on the quantity of foreign residents currently in the San Juan del Sur area. There are full-time ex-patriot residents, time-sharers, business owners and operators, and the full gamut of tourists from high end

investors to backpacking surfers. Additional research is desperately needed to fully elaborate the size and nature of this population. A footprint analysis is useful for revealing hidden impacts of tourism and for highlighting the impacts of tourists vs. local residents (Hunter and Shaw, 2006; 2007; Gossling, 2002). This would serve to compare the elevated impacts on resources from this group with the footprint of local residents in and around San Juan del Sur.

The ideas proposed by Painter and Durham (1995) were developed out of an edited volume of case studies, and have since been applied to the work of many other scholars working in various disciplines (Carr, 2000; Frazier, 1997; Gwynne, 2004; , 2004; Loker, 1996). While these ideas have been applied in research on tourism research (Stonich, 1998; 2000), to my knowledge this is the first effort to apply the conceptual framework describing the self-reinforcing cycles leading to disparities of capital accumulation and impoverishment to tourism. While ethnographic research typically demonstrates strong internal validity, reliability is often weak. In order to conclude the result found here go beyond the highly entrenched inequalities characteristic of Nicaragua, additional cases will needed to examine these processes in other contexts.

Conclusions

This research began as an ethnographic study of a single ecotourism project. The data presented here are highly descriptive and utilize local, on-the-ground perspectives of ecotourism at Morgan's Rock, as well as views of the phenomenon of tourism in

general as it is occurring in southwestern Nicaragua. While conducted the research it quickly became apparent that for most residents in this area of Nicaragua, tourism is such a new development phenomenon that they have not had sufficient exposure to the discourses of sustainability or ecotourism to effectively distinguish between different forms of tourism. Therefore, given the quantity of tourism-related activity taking place in the surrounding area, attempts to isolate impacts of a single ecotourism project on local residents forced consideration of larger processes stemming from tourism development in the region. Ecotourism as it exists at Morgan's Rock may in fact enable these processes by serving as the initial exposure to the region and to many of the real estate and investment opportunities that exist in the area. This indicates that even if ideally managed, ecotourism in such a context represents nothing more than a boulder jutting out of the water of a rushing river of resort, vacation home, golf course, and other mass tourism development up and down the southwestern Nicaragua coast.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Since each individual chapter has included a formal conclusion, the dissertation concludes here with a brief summary of the prominent themes of the research. This study ethnographically examines the socio-cultural influences on ecotourism outcomes at Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge in southwestern Nicaragua. This operation is located in a region of the country current undergoing many forms of intensive tourism development. Yet to due armed conflict and political unrest, tourism is largely a new phenomenon there and in Nicaragua in general. The local perspectives gathered here reveal few meaningful distinctions made between ecotourism as it exists at Morgan's Rock and the larger processes of conventional tourism in the San Juan del Sur area. As a result, a discussion of this research requires consideration of the nature and quantity of the overall picture of tourism development in the area of which this ecotourism project is but one small part. While the original intention was to focus specifically on ecotourism, different aspects of the relationship between ecotourism and tourism surface in each of the chapters presented here. Therefore this research is well-positioned to contribute to the discussion of several pertinent questions related to these this relationship. For example, what exactly distinguished ecotourism from other forms of tourism, how should it be evaluated? Who should carry out those evaluations? What opportunities exist to merge theories derived from research on local reactions to conventional tourism with those focusing on involvement in ecotourism specifically? Lastly, is tourism

following in the footsteps of previous failed development initiatives by increasing disparities of wealth and access to resources, and if so, to what extent does ecotourism contribute to, or help reverse, these processes? The following sections summarize the results of the previous chapters as related to address these questions.

The Two Ecotourisms

Chapter II of this dissertation presents Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge first as both an "absolute" failure and a "relative" success. The absolute nature of the failure related to Morgan's Rock's poor performance with respect to the common components of ecotourism described by scholars, such as those presented by Honey, 2002). These ideas about ecotourism emerged with the almost simultaneous definition of the phenomenon, first presented by Ceballos Lascurain (1987), and the publication of the Brundtland Report's *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987). The introduction of the sustainable development paradigm brought much attention to the new phenomenon of ecotourism. International funding agencies, private NGOs and the conservation community all championed it as a tool for implementing sustainability in tourism (Ziffer, 1989; Boo, 1990; Honey, 1999). As a result, ecotourism became the fastest growing segment of the tourism in the 1990s (Weinburg, et al., 2002).

Embedded in these efforts, and disseminated by them, was the discourse about the potential of ecotourism to be an effective mechanism for both biodiversity conservation and community development. Research on ecotourism followed a similar trajectory of growth in the 1990s. This research and the theories developed from it have

perpetuated this discourse, as the following quote from a review of research on ecotourism demonstrates, “defenses and critiques of ecotourism both share the assumption that it constitutes a promising route for generating benefits for those living close to tropical biodiversity without undermining its existence” (Agrawal and Redford: 20).

The rhetoric of ecotourism inherently reflects Western values of nature, tropical biodiversity, benefits, communities, and so forth (Mowforth and Munt, 2008; West and Carrier, 2005; Carrier and MacLeod, 2005). Morgan’s Rock marketing materials and webpage are liberally peppered with such discourse. This *ecotourism* is thus created by the discourse related to sustainable development and its application to tourism in the form of ecotourism. It has been reinforced through the continuing efforts of the conservation community, NGOs, lending agencies, and even the work of scholars. Wight describes this perspective as utilizing the public interest in the environment in order to conserve the resources upon which ecotourism depends (1993). This *ecotourism* concerns itself with effective biodiversity protection and meaningful community development in order to sell those successes to a growing population of discerning, responsible ecotourists. The lofty objectives of ecotourism inherent to this perspective and its associated discourse, which not even the founding members of the International Ecotourism Society fulfill completely (Christ, in Honey, 2008), place very heavy burdens on ecotourism. Based on this *theoretical* perspective of ecotourism, Morgan’s Rock is an absolute failure.

Yet scholars need to also recognize a second manifestation of ecotourism. When the “committed of the committed” still fail to touch on all aspects of ecotourism (Honey, 2008), ecotourism *in practice* inevitably diverges from the theory and founding principles (Ross and Wall, 2002; Cater, 2004). Though Ross and Wall (1999) optimistically call for a reconciliation of the theory and practice of ecotourism, it remains unclear if the move is being made toward this reconciliation or away from it. This ecotourism tends to favor industry interests, and used the public’s interest in the environment as a means of marketing the product, conserving resources only to the extent necessary to maintain the project (Wight, 1993). This fluidity of perspective is described by Hunt and Stronza (2009) as depending on the level of analysis. Orams (1995) came to similar conclusions in a review of ecotourism definitions by demonstrating how definitions of ecotourism exist on a continuum of responsibility. At one end, the standards of ecotourism are so stringent that ecotourism is impossible to achieve. This “committed of the committed” failure to achieve ecotourism comes to mind here. At the other end of the continuum, which is more passive and only seeks to minimize damage rather than make active contributions to protect resources, almost all tourism might qualify as ecotourism (1995). Claims have even been made to include sport fishing (Holland, Ditton, and Graefe, 1998) and safari hunting (Noveli, Barnes, and Humavindu (2006), and zoos Ryan and Saward (2004) under the umbrella of ecotourism. Evaluations of Morgan’s Rock coming from this end of the definitional spectrum could only conclude it is a relative, if not major, success.

Ecotourism is now recognized as a Western construct (Cater, 2006) that involves the imposition of outside values related to nature and development (West and Carrier, 2004). There is also the recognition of the importance of local voices to both the successful operation of ecotourism (Lindberg, et al., 1996; Campbell, 1999; Alexander, 1999; Stronza and Pegas, 2008). If ecotourism is best operated with the inclusion of local perspectives, shouldn't evaluations of it also be based on local perspectives? More recent writing highlights the utility of local perspective to evaluations of ecotourism (Crick, 2002; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). The second chapter presented uses the voices of those intimately involved with ecotourism to describe the salience of harsh Nicaraguan socio-economic and environmental conditions. By drawing this researcher's attention to this context, and away from the absolute ecotourism standards that even the "committed of the committed" fail to touch on completely, these local voices revealed Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge to be a success.

Theoretical Divide between Tourism and Ecotourism

The relationship between the phenomenon of tourism and the sub-niche of ecotourism is a contentious one. Many scholars described ecotourism as diametrically opposed to tourism, as Diamantis (1999) states in a review of ecotourism definitions, as polar opposites. Yet others have claimed the ecotourism and mass tourism are not mutually exclusive but rather are inextricably linked (Weaver, 2001; Kontogeorgopolous, 2004). If this is the case, then decades-old theories derived from research on conventional tourism should be applicable to research specific to

ecotourism. The third chapter of this dissertation tests this hypothesis by comparing traditional tourism theory that utilize step-based models to explain local resident responses to tourism with a separate line of research related to the nature of participation in ecotourism.

Doxy's Irridex (1975), Butler's tourism destination life-cycle (1980), Dogan's forms of adjustment (1989), and Ap and Crompton's (1993) Resident Strategies models all share the assumption the increasing experience with tourism leads to increasingly negative responses to it. In contrast, the dominant literature on ecotourism, which has emerged from numerous disciplines including but not limited to tourism studies, suggests that increasing levels of involvement and participation leads to more favorable attitudes and perceptions of ecotourism (Lindberg et al., 1996; Alexaner, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2004; Charnley, 2005; Stronza, 2007; Stronza and Pegas, 2008; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). These perspective appear to conflict and were examined in the context of Morgan's Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge. It turns out that those receiving the most direct benefit from ecotourism through their employment were the ones that demonstrated the most negative attitudes towards Morgan's Rock. This seemed to support the body of literature originating in the field of tourism suggesting those with more experience in tourism will be more likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards it.

Despite the perceived conflict between the tourism perspective and the research on participation in ecotourism, this research suggests the two lines of thinking may not be mutually exclusive. The types of quality opportunities to meaningfully participate in decisions related to management as described by Stronza (2007) and Schevyns (1999) do

not exist for those interviewed. Through their perception of inequitable distribution of benefits, perhaps the ecotourism employees are displaying the attitudes witnessed by Belsky (1999). Meaningful participation is lacking and thus responsible for the negative attitudes towards Morgan's Rock. Yet coming to this conclusion is complicated by locals' universal support for tourism development as a whole in the region. Positive perceptions of, and attitudes towards, tourism were demonstrated regardless of level of involvement in ecotourism at Morgan's Rock. This provides firm support for the altruistic surplus theory as described by Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) which concludes that individuals will dismiss negative impacts to themselves as individuals when they perceived the collective impacts in their communities to be positive. Employees disempowered (Schevyns, 1999) by Morgan's Rock, as well as local residents who have lost access to important subsistence resources and who experience increased cost of living due to tourism, still support tourism development in Nicaragua. In the only other instance where the altruistic surplus theory was applied in the context of a developing country, high levels of social capital were used to explain the emphasis on collective benefits (Clifton and Benson, 2006). In the present case, social capital appears very low among participants in this research and therefore support for the social capital explanation appears lacking. The severely depressed economic situation and the highly disparate distribution of wealth appear more likely to explain this support. In any case, this dissertation provides further evidence that tourism and ecotourism research, once considered diametrically opposed phenomenon, may benefit from further integration.

Ecotourism: Contributing to or Reversing Vicious Cycles

In the late 1970s, the World Bank and the International Development Bank closed down their tourism-related departments (Honey, 2008). The mounting criticism of tourism as a development strategy, and the collateral socio-cultural impacts, led to this abandonment of tourism as a development strategy. Research on other agriculturally-oriented development programs described many similarly undesirable social, environmental and economic outcomes in that sector (Painter and Durham, 1995). Yet with the publication of the Brundtland Report's *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987) and the introduction of the sustainability as a development paradigm, tourism was revisited as a development option. These development agencies, NGOs, and private investors channeled large sums of money into ecotourism as a means of achieving sustainability in tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 2008). The social and environmental ills of previous eras of development were seemingly forgotten. This research shows that tourism as it is developing around the San Juan del Sur area of Nicaragua is following in the footsteps of previous failed development schemes.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation thus deals with another subjective concept where theory and practice have diverged - development. Daly (1990) describes development as an improvement in quality of life not necessarily related to economic conditions, and then distinguishes it from growth, which inherently involves continued consumption of resources, many of which are in increasingly short supply. Still other scholars recently begun to describe the "myth of development" (de Rivero, 2001) and the brutal accumulation of capital in order to advance a Western agenda of globalizing

markets. Given the foreign-driven nature of tourism development in Nicaragua, and the absence of major quality-of-life improvements, development through tourism would appear to remain a myth in Nicaragua.

Agrawal and Redford (2006: 23) are critical in their review of ecotourism research stating that “existing studies have a predisposition to take features of the context for granted – so evident as not to merit much attention as potentially critical elements that shape outcomes.” Despite this research being a case study as well, I have attempted to do precisely what Agrawal and Redford suggest by continually drawing attention to specific aspects of the Nicaragua context and letting local voices describe how the outcomes of tourism have been shaped by that context. Morgan’s Rock Hacienda and Ecolodge exist in a beehive of tourism related development up and down the southwestern Nicaragua coast. Even if the project were optimally managed, which previous chapters reveal is not necessarily the case, this ecotourism project only contributes to the vicious cycles of capital accumulation and impoverishment perpetuated by the collective impacts of rapid, foreign-driven tourism development. This was reinforced by residents’ failure to verbalize much distinction between ecotourism and other types of tourism development happening in the region, to identify much in the way of empowering community outreach or to describe compensation for lost access to important resources. While scholars have described situations where ecotourism can reverse these vicious cycles (Stronza and Durham, 2008), if these isolated cases are vastly outnumbered by situations where ecotourism contributes to such processes, it would appear that the exception to the rule is being favored over the rule.

Future research is needed to understand when ecotourism can confront such cycles, and when it contributes to them. This case study suggests the extreme disparities of wealth in Nicaragua, which pre-dated the relatively recent surge in tourism development, have hindered ecotourism's capacity to do so in this case.

Closing Thoughts

The importance of the external, socio-cultural and economic conditions just described above is a theme resurfaces continually throughout this research. It was in fact the attention to this bustling context of tourism development around Morgan's Rock that lead to the second theme - the ecotourism-tourism nexus – that underlies much of the writing here. This nexus is first revealed in the second chapter with two, equally valid, yet totally contrasting evaluations of the same project are described. One view involves the perception of ecotourism as being wholly separate from, and even a polar opposite of, tourism. Morgan's Rock fell short of the lofty expectations created by this view of ecotourism. The second viewpoint sees ecotourism as simply a sub-group, albeit a more responsible one, of tourism. Local participants, largely unfamiliar with scholarly distinctions, were more likely to exhibit the second perspective and thus revealed many relative merits of this project. The lack of distinction made by most residents makes the examination of the ecotourism-tourism nexus in the third chapter all the more appropriate. The integration of traditional tourism theory with the scholarly work on ecotourism is hindered by the view of ecotourism as diametrically opposed to tourism, and here efforts to reconcile these theoretical stances have born fruit. If the gap

between ecotourism in theory and practice widens, it may be more appropriate to recognize that ecotourism exists, not as a polar opposite of tourism, but actually under its auspices. This position on the tourism-ecotourism nexus is supported by the writing presented here in Chapter IV.

In these ways this dissertation has contributed to the scholarly discussion of ecotourism. It may very well ask more questions than it answers, though such questions continue to be of great importance given the growing population of people whose livelihoods, for better or worse, are being affected by the implementation of ecotourism. This includes those rural residents of San Juan del Sur. If ecotourism indeed represents nothing more than a boulder jutting out of a rushing river of mass tourism development up and down the southwestern Nicaragua coast, one is left to wonder how long before that boulder erodes under the force of the water.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMUNITY RESIDENTS #_____

Dissertation Research Title:

Collaborative NSF Research: Cross-cultural Analysis of Participation in Ecotourism

Name of Interviewer : _____

Date : _____

Household Number : _____

Village : _____

Starting time : _____

Finishing time : _____

For further information contact:

Notes:

I. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Name	Sex	Age	Years of School	Birth place
(interviewee)				
(spouse)				

1. How many children do you have? _____
2. What ages are your children? _____
3. How many people currently live in your household permanently?

Adults_____ Children_____

II. HOUSEHOLD INCOME: What are all of the sources of income in your household?

1-
2-
3-
4-
5-
6-
7-
8-

4. What activity generates most income for your family?
5. What activity is most important for you?

II. INCOME (cont.) – Household Subsistence

Agriculture

Crop/cultivar	# hectares OR # trees/plants	Subsistence, Sale, both?	Earnings last year?

Livestock

Animal	Number	Subsistence, Sale, both?	Estimated earnings last year (include eggs, milk, meat, etc.)

Extraction

Wild species	Harvest rate [quantity gathered per month, sold at what price]	Estimated earnings last year

Hunting

Species	Harvest rate and prices [on average, how many animals per month, how many sold, at what price]	Estimated earnings last year

Fishing

Species	Harvest rate and prices [on average, how many animals per month, how many sold, at what price]	Estimated earnings last year

Wage employment/Other (as identified in initial list)

Position	Wage per hour/day/week	Estimated earnings last year

II. INCOME (cont.) - Expenses

On average, how much does your family spend per week on expenses? [Ask people to identify expenses for themselves, without prompting. This will include food, transportation, rent , etc.]

Item	Estimated weekly amount spent
1-	
2-	
3-	
4-	
5-	
6-	
7-	
8-	
9-	
10-	

Indicators of wealth [first obtain a free-list of top 8 items that indicate “wealth” in your village]

Items	Estimated value (consider how many years owned, price at purchase)
1-	
2-	
3-	
4-	
5-	
6-	
7-	
8-	

III. PARTICIPATION IN AND PERCEPTION OF TOURISM

6. What benefits have you received from X [lodge or tour operation]?
7. If you received income from tourism, what did you do with earnings?
8. What do you hope to do with your future earnings from tourism?
9. How do you think the money that tourists bring to this community should be used?
10. What are the good things about the tourism here in the village?
11. What are the bad things about the tourism here in the village?
12. Has your life changed in any way as a result of tourism? How, why?

13. Who owns X [lodge or tourism operation]?

14. What do you think about X [lodge or tourism operation]?

15. Have you participated/been involved in X [lodge or tour operation] Yes () No
() – follow up

16. Was this involvement as an employee [lodge or tour operation]? Yes () No
()

<i>If yes, Position (s)</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Income (indicate per month or year)</i>

17. If not as an employee, how are/were you involved in X?

18. Would you like your children to work at X [lodge or tour operation]? Why/why not?

19. What are the advantages to working in tourism?

20. What are the disadvantages to working in tourism?

IV. CONSERVATION and RESOURCE MGMT. INSTITUTIONS

1. Target A: _____

21. What are the threats to TARGET A?
22. Does the community have any rules/guidelines about using TARGET A? What are they?
23. Why were these rules/guidelines established? (when/who)
24. What happens to violators when the rules/guidelines for TARGET A are not followed?
25. Can you think of an example when this happened? (how often does this happen?)
26. Who do you think is responsible for TARGET A?
27. How has TARGET A changed in the last 10 years?
28. How did people use TARGET A before tourism?
29. What did people think about TARGET A before tourism?

2. Target B: _____

30. What are the threats to TARGET B?
31. Does the community have any rules/guidelines about using TARGET B? What are they?
32. Why were these rules/guidelines established? (when/who)
33. What happens to violators when the rules/guidelines for TARGET B are not followed?
34. Can you think of an example when this happened? (how often does this happen?)
35. Who do you think is responsible for TARGET B?
36. How has TARGET B changed in the last 10 years?
37. How did people use TARGET B before tourism?
38. What did people think about TARGET B before tourism?

3. Target C: _____

39. What are the threats to TARGET C?
40. Does the community have any rules/guidelines about using TARGET C? What are they?
41. Why were these rules/guidelines established? (when/who)
42. What happens to violators when the rules/guidelines for TARGET C are not followed?
43. Can you think of an example when this happened? (how often does this happen?)
44. Who do you think is responsible for TARGET C?
45. How has TARGET C changed in the last 10 years?
46. How did people use TARGET C before tourism?
47. What did people think about TARGET C before tourism?

V. COLLECTIVE ACTION

48. If you could change something here in the village, what would it be? Why?

49. In the past 12 months, have you worked with others in your community to do something for the benefit of the community? What were three such activities in the past 12 months?

50. Was participation in these voluntary or required?

51. Has the community ever cooperated to solve a problem? What kinds of problem(s) or examples?

52. Has the community ever cooperated to build something? Explain.

53. Has the community ever cooperated to protect something? Explain.

54. What proportion of people in this community generally work together to solve problems?

Everyone () More than half () About half () Less than half () No one ()

55. Does anything happen to people who do not participate in community activities? Are they criticized or sanctioned?

VII. CONTROL & DECISION-MAKING

56. How much control do you feel you have in making decisions that affect this community? Explain

57. How much impact do you think you have in making this community a better place to live?

A big impact () A small impact () No impact ()

VIII. PERCEPTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE

58. How would you define a good life?

59. Do you have a good life? Why/why not?

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

VITA

Carter Allan Hunt received his B.A. in psychology with a Spanish minor from The University of Kentucky in 1997. He entered the Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences program at Texas A&M University in August 2000 and received his M.S. in May 2003. His research interests include ecotourism and conservation social science in Latin America. He intends to publish in the areas of tourism studies, anthropology, and development.

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